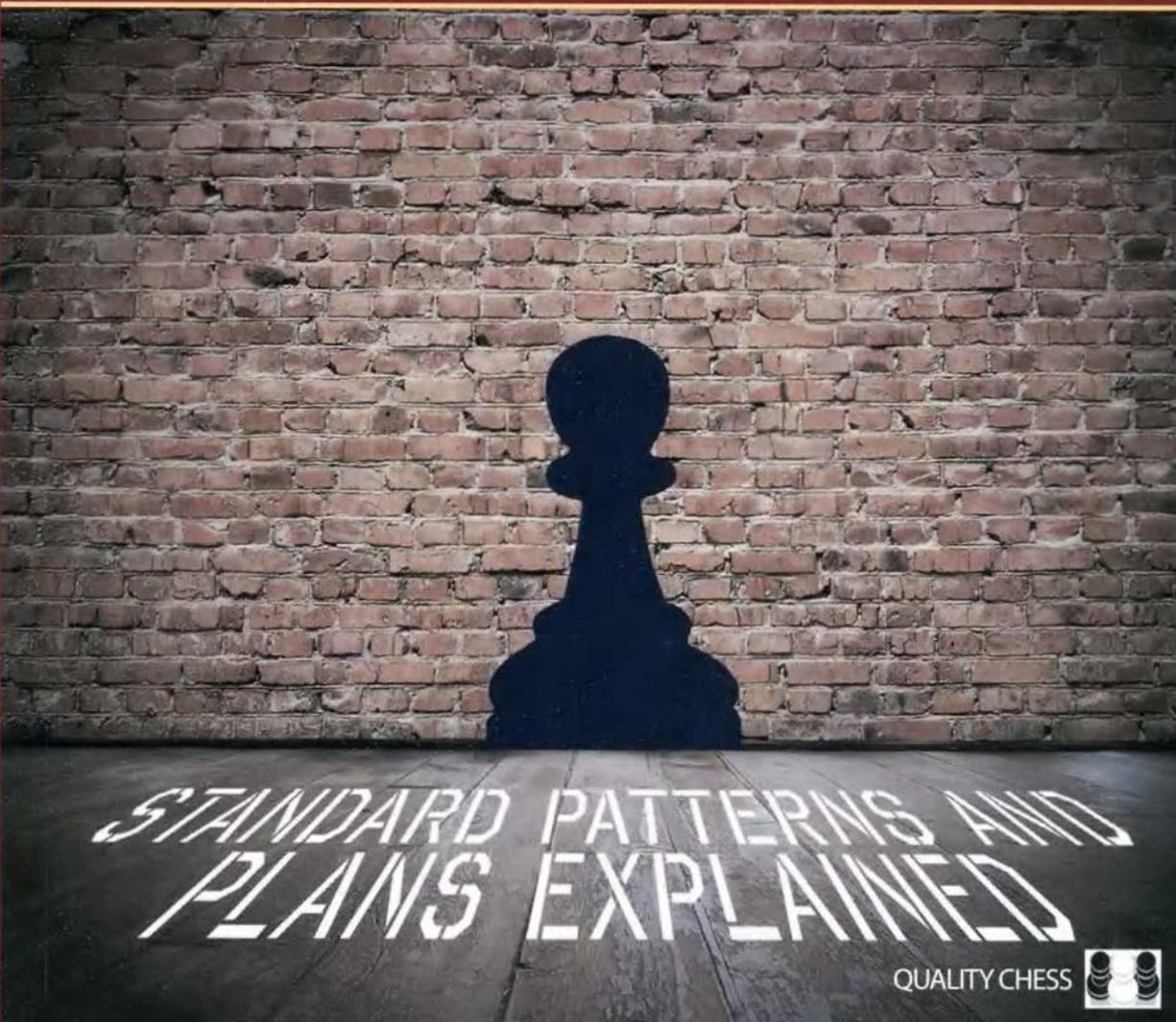
CHESS STRUCTURES

A GRANDMASTER GUIDE

Mauricio Flores Rios



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Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide

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Chess Structures

A Grandmaster Guide

By

Mauricio Flores Rios

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The content of this book could not have been presented as well without the help of Aura Salazar and Javier Cortes who carefully studied earlier versions of this work and provided many useful suggestions to make the exposition clearer. Their questions and criticism encouraged me to expand certain topics and find examples to illustrate my message in a better way.

Finally, I would like to thank Aura for encouraging me to regain my ambition in chess, both as a player and trainer. This ambition and her support drove me through the challenging process of writing this book.

Foreword

I first met Mauricio ten years ago, as we both competed in Pan-American youth competitions. Later we both received a chess scholarship to attend the University of Texas at Brownsville. We were teammates for four years and spent countless hours studying chess together, though our training preferences were very different. Mauricio read books, analyzed his games and prepared openings. I did these things too, but in reality the vast majority of my time was spent looking over current chess games and playing. I was surprised when Mauricio told me he had written a book partially inspired by my training methods, and I was certainly interested to see what was in it.

The truth about my training method is that looking over a game for just a couple of minutes can actually be a wonderful investment, *if done correctly*. The key is searching for **repeating patterns**; this takes some practice but is feasible. In my career I have seen close to 100,000 chess games, including most of the grandmaster-level games played over the past decade. The cumulative experience from spending a minute or two on each of these games has allowed me to gain an excellent positional understanding. Staring at a position for a few seconds is often enough for me to see who is better, which plans will work, which pieces should be traded, etc.

Acquiring such a level of experience and positional knowledge requires many years. Going through thousands and thousands of games takes a very long time, even if you only spend a couple of minutes on each. Most importantly, being able to actually **see the patterns** does not come easily to everyone. Addressing these two difficulties is exactly the purpose of this book.

Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide is an excellent selection of model games. By studying the 140 games and fragments in this book, the reader will learn many of the most important plans, patterns and ideas in chess. The organization of this book is particularly helpful in this regard. The pawn structure is the most important factor to determine the nature of a game; therefore, studying model games classified by structure allows the reader to acquire reliable strategic knowledge much more easily. Mauricio's detailed explanations allow the reader to identify the key elements in each example. Moreover, each game constitutes a building block toward the understanding of the structure as a whole.

I am certain the readers of this book will find it both useful and entertaining. They will complete the opening phase understanding the strategic landscape of the position. Most importantly, studying this book will help them to better understand the opening itself, and even to choose variations depending on what middlegame position they wish to play. I give this book my highest recommendation, and I feel sure readers will profit from it.

GM Axel Bachmann
Ciudad del Este, Paraguay
December 2014

Key to symbols used

⩲	White is slightly better
⩱	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
⩳	with compensation
⇆	with counterplay
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

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Preface

The idea for this book was in the back of my mind for several years before coming to fruition. The book was born out of my desire to guide players who, like me, struggle to apply their strategic knowledge to a practical game. My aim is to provide something new to chess literature; to write the book I should have studied myself earlier in my career. This is not the typical strategy book, but before I tell you what this book is, let me tell you how I realized this book is necessary, especially for self-learners.

My progress in chess was very fast, but very difficult, even frustrating. Due to geographical and financial constraints I drew most of my knowledge from books, rather than learning from an experienced master. I studied many strategy books and I remember embracing every word in them as a piece of gold written in ink. However, as I scaled the rating ladder I was dazzled by my inability to correctly evaluate positions despite my supposedly *vast strategic knowledge*. I was well versed in modern strategy but sometimes the concepts in my books were contradictory, or difficult to apply in practice. I often lost games without ever understanding the reason; *my books had no answers!*

By the time I had become a FIDE Master, I had concluded that the strategic rules in my books only worked sometimes, and this was not good enough. I was afraid to use potentially incorrect rules and I changed my style to avoid dealing with them. I became a strong tactician and avoided strategy at all costs. Unfortunately, I could not always obtain sharp positions and in quiet games my lack of understanding often led me to lose miserably. In fact, I became a grandmaster at eighteen knowing less than half of this book's contents.

There already exist dozens of books providing an excellent introduction to chess strategy, and I recommend you read one. These books are a starting point, but they are insufficient. They teach strategic elements without shedding much light on which factors will play a bigger role in a specific position. It is like giving you several tools without telling you which one to use. A different class of strategy book provides many concrete examples and shows how the strategic tools are selected and used. Such books are often entertaining and even inspiring, but they lack specificity. At times reading these books can leave you more confused than before, as you have learned rules but do not exactly know when to apply them. My experience as a coach has only confirmed this phenomenon.

Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide emphasizes clarity, precision and completeness over generality. I do not intend to teach rules applicable to every position. Such rules typically do not exist. Moreover, even if such rules existed, the chance that such a complex message will be misunderstood is far too high. Let's not risk it! My aim is to provide an easy-to-understand strategic guide to the most frequently-occurring classes of positions in chess. I hope readers will find this helpful, as it greatly reduces ambiguity; it is clear when rules will be valid and when they will not. In this sense, this book is a collection of analyzed model games, logically organized into families of similar positions with common strategic ideas. As Capablanca said in his book *Chess Fundamentals*, every player should have a collection of games and ideas within his chess knowledge. This book intends to provide developing players with a fine selection of such games and ideas. These games are presented within the context of well-defined classes, to enhance the learning process and prevent confusion.

Naturally, the best (and least ambiguous) way to classify chess positions is based on their pawn structure. I divide this book into twenty-four chapters, which discuss the most ***interesting*** and

common structures in modern practice. These positions encompass a wide variety of openings and middlegames, which are present in the vast majority of all chess games. I hope my readers will find this book to be a practical and, most importantly, an accessible guide to learning how these specific positions should be conducted.

Mauricio Flores Rios
Minneapolis, December 2014

Introduction

What you will find in this book

This book is divided into twenty-two chapters describing some of the most important and common structures in chess. Two final chapters contain a compilation of exercises and detailed solutions. Deciding which structures deserved a chapter, and which did not, proved challenging, but I am satisfied with the final selection. Chapters are ordered so that similar structures are close to one another. In fact, these structures are implicitly divided into five classes or families, each of which is more closely associated with one particular type of opening. Learning all structures within a family is very useful, as players must frequently decide between two options that yield different, yet related, structures. It is helpful to know which structure will prove more favourable. These five families are as follows:

Family One: d4 and ...d5

This family consists of the structures that will typically arise when the moves d2-d4 and ...d7-d5 occur early in the game. Typical openings would be the Queen's Gambit Orthodox Defence, the Slav or the Queen's Indian Defence, but there are many others, such as the Scandinavian, the Caro-Kann or the Alapin Variation against the Sicilian Defence. This family encompasses Chapters 1 through 7. In addition, I discuss the Panov structure in the Caro-Kann and the 3–3 vs. 4–2 pawn structure, which are related to this family, in Chapter 22.

Family Two: Open Sicilian

This family includes those structures that typically occur in the Open Sicilian. It focuses on two types of positions: those that occur when Black plays ...e7-e5 instead of ...e7-e6; and then Hedgehog and Maroczy positions. This family spans Chapters 8 through 11. The Scheveningen and Dragon structures are discussed in Chapter 22.

Family Three: Benoni

This small family is devoted to those structures in which Black confronts the queen's pawn opening with a ...c7-c5 strategy and White replies with d4-d5. Later, when Black challenges the centre with ...e7-e6 and ...exd5, White must choose between cxd5 and exd5. Chapter 12 is devoted to studying the first option, which is typically known as a Benoni-type position, while Chapter 13 studies the alternative exd5. The related Benko structure is discussed in Chapter 22.

Family Four: King's Indian

This family of five chapters is devoted to the multiple types of structure arising from the King's Indian Defence and its relatives. It is an extremely interesting and complex group of chapters to study, but it contains plenty of tactical and strategic ideas. This family encompasses Chapters 14 to 18. The related structures of the Closed Ruy Lopez and Lopez Formation are discussed in Chapter 22.

Family Five: French

This family of three chapters studies the pawn chains that typically arise in the French Defence. It should be noted that such structures often occur in the Sicilian, the anti-Sicilian, the English Opening, the Catalan and many others. It covers Chapters 19 to 21.

Miscellaneous Chapter

As you may see from the list above, Chapter 22 covers many structures. This chapter allows me to discuss structures which are in some sense too "strategically limited" to deserve a full chapter, or simply not so popular. Still, this chapter presents some of the interesting points of these structures, and deserves a close look.

Structure selection

Naturally it would be impossible to cover every structure. It was a challenge to decide which structures were worthy of inclusion, and which ones were not. I gave priority to the following:

Strategic over tactical: I prefer discussing structures with a substantial strategic component. Structures like the Dragon are discussed only briefly in Chapter 22. The reason is that tactics and opening knowledge tend to predominate, offering fewer long-term plans for us to study.

Frequent over rare: I gave priority to those structures that arise more often, to offer a practical selection that the reader would be likely to encounter in play. Rare structures are not included.

Fixed over flexible: Plans often begin to form after something happens with the pawn structure. That is, pawns are traded, a pawn chain is formed or there is tension in the centre. This creates a semi-stable pawn structure. I only chose structures in which this was the case. If there is no pawn contact whatsoever, then multiple options remain open, but the game is likely to reach one of our structures at a later stage.

Generally relevant over specific: I tried to avoid structures that occur in only one opening. For this reason, I do not discuss the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez, or the doubled pawn arising in the Trompowsky, or the Winawer or MacCutcheon variations of the French. I do mention the Benko structure in Chapter 22, but primarily because it is relevant to the asymmetric Benoni studied in Chapter 12.

Exercises

The book concludes with a collection of fifty positional and tactical exercises, which reinforce the ideas presented. I attempted to sort these problems from easiest to hardest, but this is merely my own evaluation. If the reader struggles with later exercises, he is likely to find inspiration by solving earlier problems. I provide detailed explanations to all of these exercises. In fact, some of these solutions convey pieces of knowledge that are not thoroughly developed in the corresponding chapter, in an attempt to keep this textbook concise and to make the exercises interesting. The reader is encouraged to first attempt the exercises, and then read these solutions as an additional chapter of supplemental examples.

Game selection

The most challenging aspect of writing this book was selecting suitable examples for the concepts I wanted to illustrate. I became so ambitious in my aim to provide a fine collection that I reviewed approximately 20,000 recent games. When I selected games, I prioritized:

- **Quality of execution**
- **Tactical simplicity, when appropriate**
- **Recent games over older games**
- **Visually appealing games**

I want this book to explain mistakes made by all levels of players. I certainly did not want to omit those mistakes the best players in the world could make. Excessive tactical complications often make the strategic message rather blurry. Therefore, I avoided *sharp tactics* whenever it was possible and reasonable. Recent games have obvious advantages over older games. First, the reader is unlikely to bore himself with something he already knows; second, recent games illustrate mistakes players make nowadays, instead of those they used to make in the past. By the past, I mean three, four or five decades ago when strategic knowledge was far less advanced than it is today. Finally, I made an effort to choose beautiful games whenever possible, simply because I would like the readers to enjoy this book.

How to use this book

I understand many readers have limited time and do not wish to read an entire book if they are only likely to encounter a few of the pawn structures I discuss. For this reason, chapters are largely self-contained, while similar chapters will be found close to one another and arranged in a logical sequence.

I took great care in ordering chapters so that all required knowledge would be available when needed. Many pawn structures can transpose to another. If structure B is likely to transpose to structure A, then I mention structure A at an earlier stage in the book. When the reader studies structure B, he will be able to understand whether transposing to structure A is favourable or not. This makes the learning process run smoothly and comprehensively.

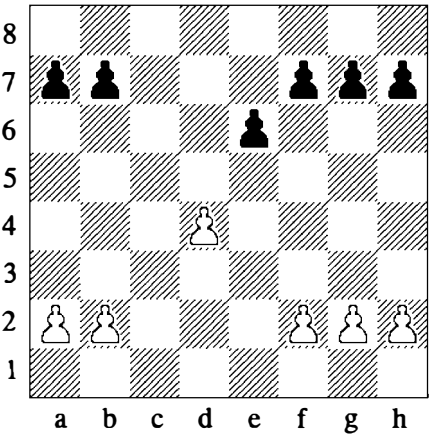
Nevertheless, I would recommend that readers study this book in its entirety even if their current repertoire is unlikely to include all of these structures. Learning new structures opens your mind to new ideas and could do wonders for your chess.

Prior works

I am aware that other authors have already discussed similar structures as I do in my book. This fact drove me to expand this book beyond my original objective. I studied previous works in depth, as my ambition was to produce the most detailed treatment on the subject yet. I am convinced this book will be a great contribution to the study of chess structures.

Chapter 1

The Isolani



The isolated queen's pawn – referred to here as the isolani – is an extremely important pawn structure. It arises in many opening variations; the Queen's Gambit Accepted, Slav, Tarrasch Defence, Sicilian Alapin or French Tarrasch to name a few. This structure is equally common with either colour, but for our discussion in this chapter we will assume it is White who has the isolani.

Generally speaking, White has better middlegame prospects, while Black has better prospects in an endgame. Therefore, White's main aim will be to build an attack, while Black's hope will be to neutralize such an attack and simplify the position, obtaining a superior endgame.

Let's discuss some specific plans:

White's plans

1. Create a kingside attack. Most standard plans will include the moves ♘e5, ♗g5 and the battery ♕d3-♗c2. In some cases a piece sacrifice on the kingside is needed to break through the defence. Rooks are typically placed on e1 and d1 (or c1), and a rook transfer via the third rank is possible.
2. Break in the centre with d4-d5, trading pawns and opening lines with an overwhelming initiative (or even sacrificing a pawn with the same purpose).

Black's plans

1. Trade pieces to win an endgame. In particular, exchange White's good bishop (the light-squared bishop).
2. Place a knight on d5. This prevents the central break d4-d5, and controls some key squares. In an endgame a rook, bishop or even a king would be strong on this square.

As we have seen, the plans in this structure are logical and easy to understand. Playing these positions, on the other hand, can be tricky. Great precision is required when calculating, and a good positional understanding is necessary in order to judge when the isolani provides good attacking chances (or other compensation) and when it is simply a weakness.

The games in this chapter show all of these common plans in some form or another. The last two games illustrate an interesting rule for evaluating whether the isolani provides enough attacking chances. As we will learn, the key is whether the player who has the isolani possesses his good bishop. The chapter finishes with a short fragment explaining the power of an isolani which has advanced to the fifth rank.

Vadim Zvjaginsev – Rodrigo Vasquez

World Rapid Ch., Khanty-Mansiysk 2013

Learning objective: The central break d4-d5 can be very powerful if Black does not effectively prepare against it.

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 cxd5 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.♘f3 e6 7.♗c4 ♘c6 8.0–0 ♗e7 9.d4 0–0 10.♖e1 ♘f6

The alternative 10...♗f6!? certainly deserves attention. Black preserves the blockade on d5, preventing possible d4-d5 breaks, and after 11.♘e4 simply 11...♗e7.

11.a3

A standard move, preventing ♘b4-d5 and clearing the a2-square for the bishop.

11...a6?!

This is somewhat slow, especially since ...b7-b5 will greatly boost the strength of the break d4-d5.

More sensible was 11...b6!? and developing the bishop next move. 12.♕d3 (now the break 12.d5 is not as effective, in view of 12...♘a5 13.♗a2 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.♕xd5 ♗e6 when Black was very close to equality in Durarbeyli – Mirzoev, Baku 2009) 12...♗b7 With a standard isolani position.

12.♗a2

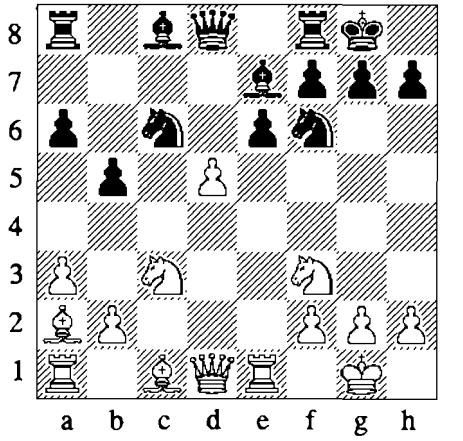
This position has been reached over one hundred times on my database, and almost fifty players chose:

12...b5?

A very serious mistake.

Black could have obtained a playable position after 12...♕c7!? 13.♗e3 ♖d8 14.♕c2± though White retains the initiative, and may proceed with ♖ad1 followed by d4-d5.

13.d5!

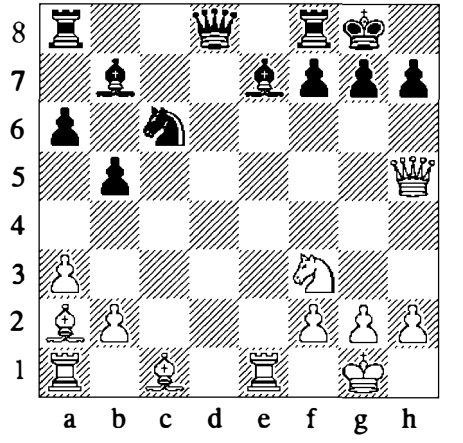


Perfect timing! Black's development is insufficient to parry all of White's threats.

13...exd5 14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.♕xd5 ♗b7

Of course not: 15...♕xd5? 16.♗xd5 ♗b7 17.♗xc6 ♗xc6 18.♖xe7+–

16.♕h5±



Black finds himself in a very difficult position, as White is bringing his pieces into a kingside attack and there is no time to organize a defence.

16...♕c7

16...h6? loses by force after: 17.♗xh6! gxh6 18.♕g6† ♔h8 19.♕xh6† ♔g8 20.♗b1 f5 21.♗a2† ♖f7 22.♕g6†

16...♕d6?!

This only aggravates Black's problems, because of:

17.♗g5!

Threatening ♖ad1.

17...♖ad8

If 17...♗xg5? 18.♘xg5 ♕g6 19.♕xg6 hxg6 20.♘xf7 ♖xf7 21.♖ad1 and Black is defenceless, for example: 21...♖af8 22.♖d7 ♗c8 23.♖xf7 ♖xf7 24.♖e8†

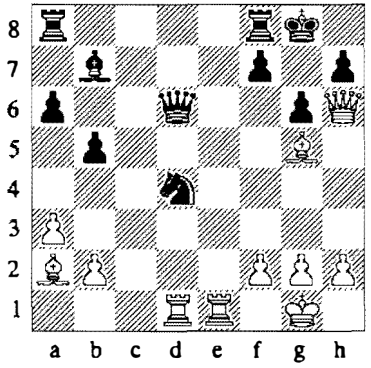
18.♗xe7 ♘xe7 19.♘g5 ♕g6 20.♕xg6!

20.♕xh7† ♕xh7 21.♘xh7 ♔xh7 22.♖xe7 ♗d5 gives Black drawing chances in the double-rook ending

20...♘xg6 21.♘xf7 ♖xf7 22.♖ad1! ♖xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗c6 24.♖d6 ♗e8 25.♖xa6

White had a winning endgame in Gurgenidze – Anikaev, Kislovodsk 1972.

16...g6 17.♕h6 ♘d4 18.♘g5 ♗xg5 19.♗xg5 ♕d6 20.♖ad1±



White has a very dangerous dynamic advantage, due to the pair of bishops and the exposed black king; for example, 20...♖ae8? loses immediately to 21.♗xf7†!.

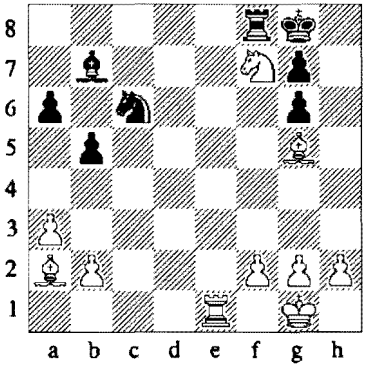
17.♗g5!

The most precise continuation.

17.♘g5!? deserves attention. 17...♗xg5 18.♗xg5 ♖ae8 19.♗d2± with a big advantage due to the bishop pair and superior piece coordination.

17...♗xg5

If 17...♖ae8? Black loses at once, in view of: 18.♗xe7 ♖xe7 19.♖xe7 ♕xe7 20.♖e1 ♕f6 21.♘g5 ♕g6 22.♕xg6 hxg6 23.♘xf7!



Black cannot recapture on f7 because 24.♖e8† wins the rook.

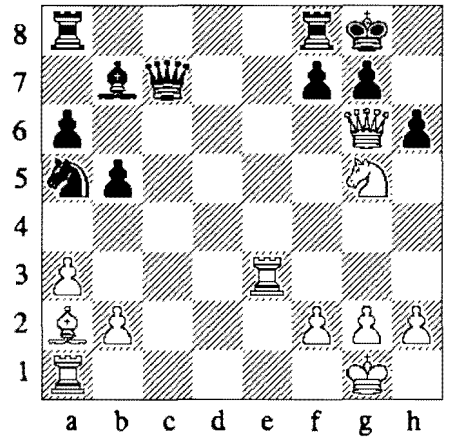
If 17...♗d6 the rook transfer decides the game after: 18.♖e4 ♘e5 19.♖h4 h6 20.♘xe5 ♗xe5 21.♗xh6+–

18.♘xg5 h6 19.♖e3 ♘a5?

The final mistake in a very difficult position. The only defence was 19...♘e5 preventing ♕g6, but after 20.♘e6! fxe6 21.♖xe5± White will be a full pawn up.

20.♕g6!+–

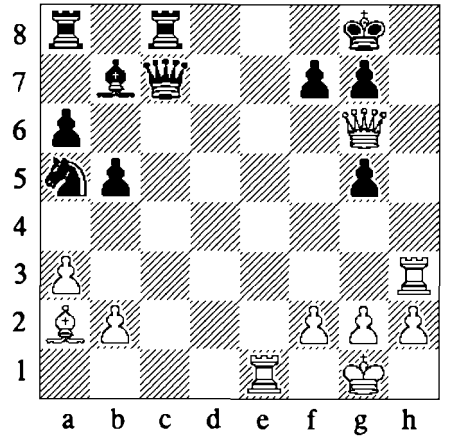
Nice finish!



20...hxg5 21.♖h3 ♖fc8

21...♖fe8 does not help because of: 22.♖h7! (but not 22.♕h7†? ♔f8 when the king escapes) 22...♕e5 (or 22...♔f8 23.♕xg7† ♔e7 24.♕xf7† ♔d6 25.♕xc7#) 23.♕xf7† ♔xh7 24.♕h5#

22.♖e1



Checkmate is unavoidable.

1–0

Final Remarks

1. Black's position would have been much safer had he kept his knight on d5.
2. It is absolutely necessary to prevent, or at least prepare against, a possible d4-d5 break.
3. Black's biggest mistake was playing the weakening moves ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5, wasting time and making the d4-d5 break even stronger.
4. After d4-d5 was played, the position was nearly lost and extremely difficult to conduct.

Alexander Huzman – Levon Aronian

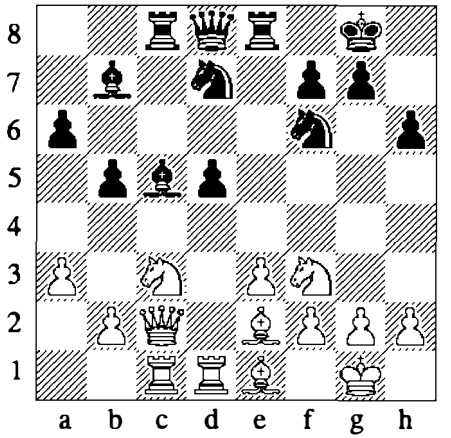
Plovdiv 2010

Learning objective: The break ...d5-d4 (colours reversed) can be very strong, even in the form of a pawn sacrifice.

1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♕c2 c5 8.dxc5 h6 9.♗d2 0–0 10.a3?!

This is a waste of time, since Black was going to capture on c5 anyway. Instead theory suggests 10.e3 ♗xc5 11.♖c1 ♕e7 12.♗e2 a6 13.♕d3 ♘b6 14.0–0= Carlsen – Ivanchuk, Romania 2011.

10...♗xc5 11.e3 a6 12.♗e2 b5 13.0–0 ♗b7 14.♖fd1 ♖c8 15.♗e1 ♖e8 16.♖ac1



16...♘f8

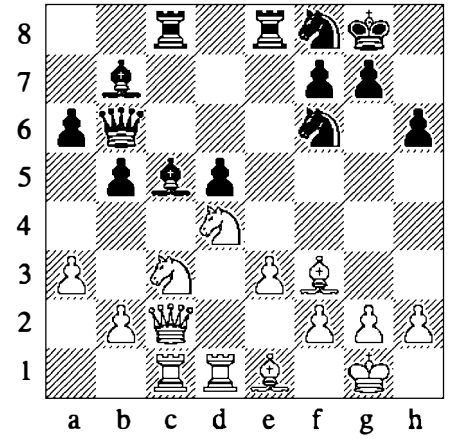
Black's knight is heading toward e6, in order to support the break ...d5-d4.

Somewhat stronger was 16...♘b6!? heading to the c4-square. 17.♘d4 ♘c4 18.♗f3 ♕e7 19.h3 ♕e5∓ Black is slightly better as the isolated d5-pawn is well supported, and he may create pressure on the centre and kingside with ...♗d6 and ...♘e4.

17.♘d4 ♕b6 18.♗f3?!

It was necessary to support the d4-square. Better was 18.♕d2 ♘e6 19.♘xe6 ♕xe6 (or

19...fxe6⁉) 20.♗f3 ♗b6 (20...♖ed8⁉=) with a standard isolani position. The d5-pawn is immune to 21.♘xd5? in view of 21...♖xc1 22.♘xf6† ♕xf6 23.♖xc1 ♗xf3 24.gxf3 ♕xf3∓ when Black regains the pawn favourably.



18...♗xd4! 19.♖xd4

19.exd4? does not help, as 19...♘e6 20.♕d3 ♘xd4! wins a pawn, since 21.♕xd4?? loses to 21...♖xe1†! 22.♖xe1 ♕xd4.

19...♘e6 20.♖d2?!

The option 20.♖dd1?! does not solve White's problems either. 20...d4! 21.♗xb7 ♕xb7 22.exd4 ♘f4 23.f3 ♘6d5 and Black is threatening ...♘xc3 followed by ...♘e2 or ...♖e2. White is in deep trouble, for example: 24.♖d2 a5 25.♕b1 ♘xc3 26.♖xc3 ♖xc3 27.bxc3 ♘e2† 28.♔h1 ♘xc3 29.♕a1 b4–+ The passed b-pawn, together with tactical threats on the first rank, make Black's initiative irresistible.

Instead 20.♖h4! (as suggested by Krasenkow) allows White to stay in the game: 20...♖c4 (the break 20...d4?! is no longer effective, since after 21.♗xb7 ♕xb7 22.exd4 the key squares e4 and f4 are not available to Black's knights. On the other hand 20...♖ed8⁉∓ is a worthy alternative, preparing ...d5-d4 and taking advantage of the misplaced rook on h4) 21.♖xc4 dxc4∓ Black has some advantage owing to his superior piece coordination.

20...d4!

Aronian decides to sacrifice his isolated pawn, activating all of his pieces; Black seizes an overwhelming initiative.

21.♗xb7

Much worse is: 21.exd4? ♗xf3 22.gxf3 ♘xd4 23.♕d1 (or 23.♕d3 ♘b3–+) 23...♖xe1†!–+

21...♕xb7

Of course not 21...dxc3? due to: 22.♗xc8 cxd2 23.♗xd2+–

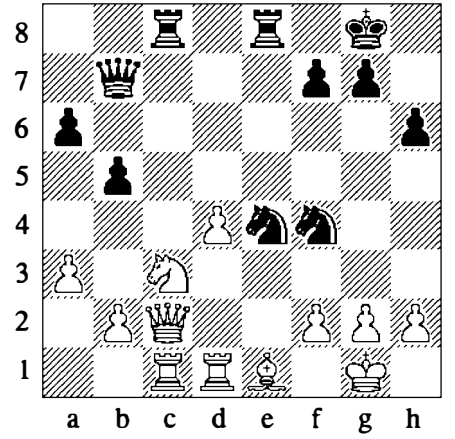
22.exd4

Black is a pawn down, but now all his pieces collaborate in the attack.

22...♘e4! 23.♖dd1

23.♕xe4? ♕xe4 24.♘xe4 ♖xc1 is also hopeless, but a better defence was 23.f3 ♘xd2 24.♕xd2, though Black has a big advantage.

23...♘f4!–+



It is possible that Huzman allowed the ...d5-d4 sacrifice because he did not expect Black's knights to be so strong. Black is immediately threatening ...♘xc3, followed by ...♕xg2#.

24.d5

Blocking the a8-h1 diagonal.

Black wins an exchange and the game after 24.f3 ♘xc3 25.♗xc3 ♘e2† 26.♔h1 ♘xc1 27.♖xc1 a5! followed by ...b5-b4.

24...a5!

This strong move enables a quick win.

Instead the tempting 24...♘xc3?! is less precise, since after 25.♗xc3 ♘e2† 26.♔h1 ♘xc1 27.♕xc1∓ White's d5-pawn allows him to hold for longer.

25.♕b3 b4 26.axb4 axb4

Threatening ...♘c5, followed by ...bxc3.

27.♘a2

27.♘xe4 does not help due to: 27...♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♘e2† 29.♔h1 ♘xc1–+

27...♘e2† 28.♔h1 ♘xc1

Black wins an exchange and the rest is easy.

29.♘xc1 ♘f6 30.d6

The try 30.♗xb4 is refuted by 30...♖b8 31.♘a2 ♘xd5! 32.♕xd5 (or 32.♖xd5? ♖e1†) 32...♕xd5 33.♖xd5 ♖xb4! since 34.♘xb4? ♖e1 is mate.

30...♕c6 31.♘a2 ♕xd6! 32.♗xb4

32.♖xd6?? ♖xe1#

32...♕b6 33.f3 ♕f2
0–1

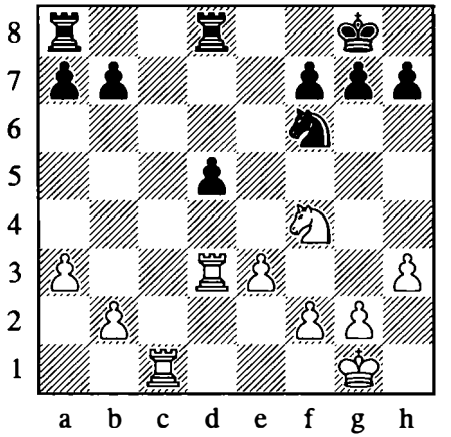
Final Remarks

1. Time is essential to obtain a good piece set-up. White's imprecision with 10.a3 allowed Black to fight for an advantage from the start.
2. White's biggest mistake was not to reinforce his control of d4 with 18.♕d2, in which case the position would have been close to equal.
3. The ...d5-d4 pawn sacrifice gave Black an essentially winning initiative.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Laurent Fressinet

Wijk aan Zee 2011

Learning objectives:
1. The side which possesses an isolani in the endgame is limited to passive defence.
2. This game exemplifies how to make progress in such a situation.



As we can readily observe, White has obtained a dream position against the isolani, as most of the pieces are off the board, and now he can play a pleasant, superior endgame.

19...♖d7 20.g4!

Claiming space on the kingside, and threatening g4-g5 followed by ♘xd5.

20...h6 21.f3

Taking the e4-square away from Black's knight.

21...♖ad8 22.♖cd1

Black's pieces are tied down.

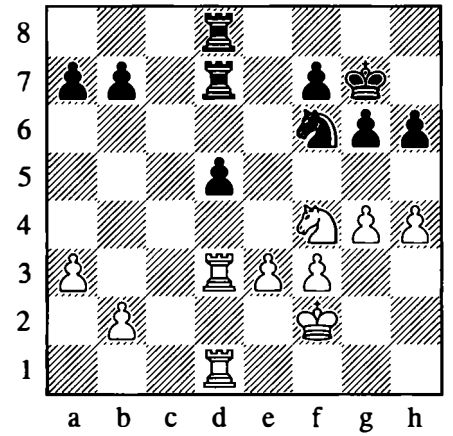
22...g6 23.♔f2

Improving slowly, while Black has nothing better than passive defence.

23...♔g7 24.h4!

Threatening g4-g5, and inviting Black to weaken his position with ...g6-g5.

An interesting alternative is 24.♘e2!? since the passive 24...♔f8 25.♘c3 ♔g7 runs into 26.h4 g5 27.h5± when the h6-pawn is very weak. However, after 24.♘e2 Black can play 24...♖e7 25.♘c3 ♖de8!, causing some problems for White by pressuring the e3-pawn.



24...g5

This is more or less forced. Black cannot really proceed without playing ...g6-g5, for example:

24...♖c8 25.♖3d2

The premature 25.g5? would allow Black to solve his problems with: 25...♖c2† 26.♖3d2 ♖xd2† 27.♖xd2 hxg5 28.hxg5 ♘h7 29.♘xd5 ♘xg5=

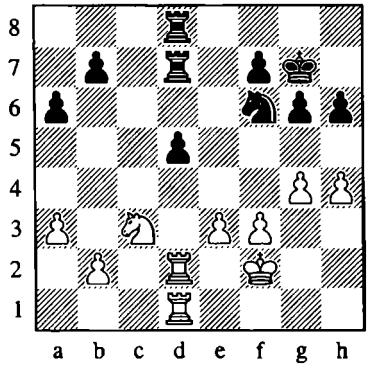
25...♖cd8

25...♖c5? loses a pawn after: 26.e4±

26.♘e2!?

Heading toward c3 before the decisive g4-g5. 26.g5? is again premature, due to 26...hxg5 27.hxg5 ♘h7.

26...a6 27.♘c3



27...♔f8

If Black now changes his mind and plays 27...g5 then 28.h5!± turns the h6-pawn into a serious weakness.

28.♘a4 ♔g7 29.g5 hxg5 30.hxg5 ♘h7 31.♘c5

31.f4!?±

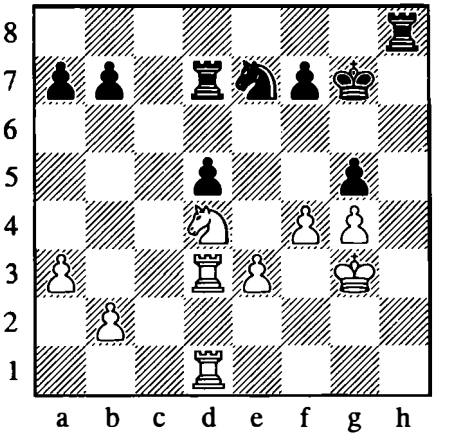
31...♖c7

31...♖d6? 32.♘xb7+–

32.♖xd5±

White has a healthy extra pawn.

25.hxg5 hxg5 26.♘e2 ♘g8 27.♘d4 ♘e7 28.♔g3 ♖h8 29.f4!



White has arranged his pieces harmoniously, and it is time to advance on the kingside. This allows an attack on Black's king, and results in the creation of a passed pawn.

29...♔g6

Black is also in trouble after 29...gxf4† 30.exf4 a6 31.♖e1 ♖c8 32.♖de3. One mistake will make Black's position collapse, for example the natural-looking 32...♘c6? loses immediately. (More stubborn is 32...♔f8 33.f5 ♖c4 34.♘f3 f6 35.♖e6 ♖c6 36.♘d4 ♖xe6 37.♘xe6†± though White will proceed with ♔f4, followed by g4-g5 creating a dangerous passed pawn.) 33.♘f5† ♔g8 (or 33...♔f6 34.♖h1! ♖g8 35.♖h7! and there is no defence against ♘h4 followed by g4-g5) 34.g5!+– Followed by ♔g4, ♖h3, ♖eh1, and ♖h8#.

30.♘f3

More precise is: 30.f5†! ♔g7 (30...♔f6 31.♘f3 ♖hd8 32.♖h1± and Black's position is nearly lost due to the multiple threats and lack of counterplay) 31.♘f3 f6 32.e4 ♘c6 (32...♖hd8?! 33.♘d4 wins as the ♘e6 threat is deadly) 33.exd5±

30...gxf4†

30...f6? loses a pawn after 31.fxg5, since 31...fxg5?? fails to 32.♘e5†.

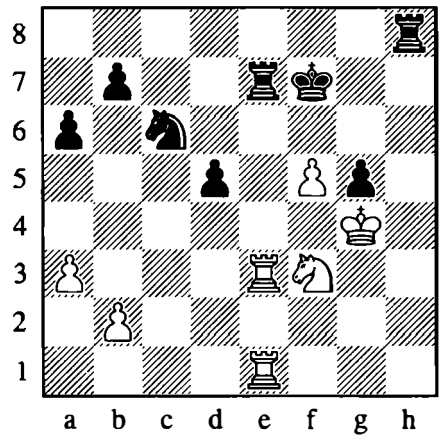
31.exf4 f6 32.f5†±

Black cannot prevent White from creating a passed pawn on the kingside, and so Black is strategically lost.

32...♔f7 33.♖e1 ♖c7 34.♘d4 a6 35.♖de3 ♘c6 36.♘f3 ♖e7 37.g5 fxg5 38.♔g4?

This unfortunate mistake could have spoiled the entire game for White.

The accurate way was 38.♖xe7†! ♘xe7 39.♘xg5† ♔f8 (if 39...♔f6? 40.♔g4! when the pawn cannot be captured by 40...♘xf5? because 41.♖e6† wins) 40.f6 ♘c6 41.♔f4± when Black's defence is extremely difficult.



38...♖he8 39.♖xe7† ♖xe7 40.♖h1 d4?

Returning the favour. The strong 40...♖e4†! would have saved the game: 41.♔xg5 ♖e3! 42.♖h7† (or 42.♔f4 ♖e4†=) 42...♔g8 43.♖h3 ♘e5! White has nothing better than repeating after: 44.♔f4 ♖e4† 45.♔g5 ♖e3=

41.♘xg5† ♔f6 42.♔f4±

We are back to the plan, as White has managed to create a passed pawn and his excellent coordination gives him the win.

42...d3?

Making things easier. A better defence was 42...♔g7 43.♘e6† ♔g8 44.♖h3± and White has everything under control.

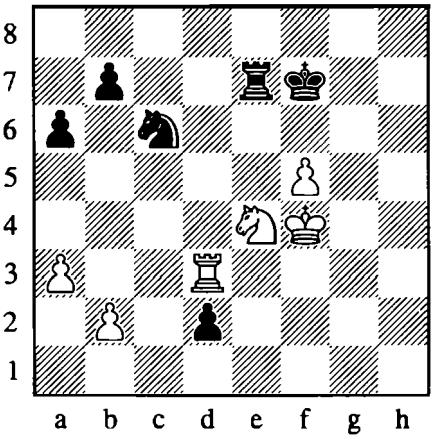
43.♘e4†

43.♖h6†!? was another winning method.

43...♔f7 44.♖h3! d2

Black cannot defend d3 with 44...♖d7? due to: 45.♖h7† ♔e8 46.♘f6†+–

45.♖d3



Black resigned, as he will be a pawn down and cannot stop the advance of the f-pawn.

1–0

Final remarks

White won this endgame in a very methodical fashion. The steps he followed were:

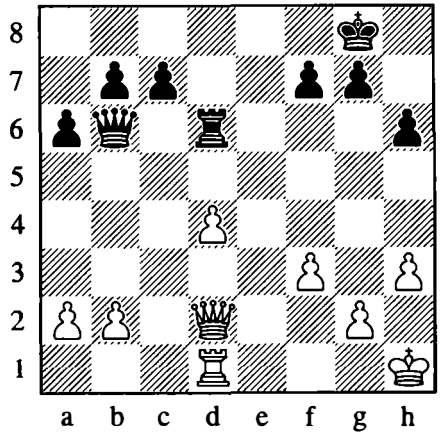
1. Attack the d5-pawn to immobilize Black's pieces, preventing counterplay.
2. Gain space on the kingside, improve his pieces' positions.
3. Create a second prong to the attack, in this case a passed pawn on the kingside, to decide the game in due course.

Oleg Korneev – Rustam Kasimdzhanov

Melilla 2011

Learning objectives:

1. This example reinforces the idea that having an isolani in the endgame is a big problem.
2. Black can use the weakness of the isolani to force the creation of new queenside weaknesses.



27...c6

White's main difficulty in this position is his lack of material denies him hope of counterplay.

28.b4

This move is necessary sooner or later in order to prevent ...c6-c5.

If White does not play b2-b4, then after 28.♔h2 ♕d8 29.♕b4 ♕d7 30.♕c4 ♖d5 the threat of ...c6-c5 forces White to play 31.b4 after all.

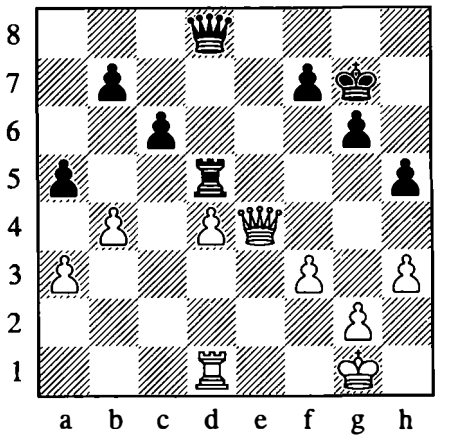
28...♕d8 29.a3 h5

Black improves his position as much as possible before going for decisive action.

30.♕f4 g6 31.♕e5 ♖d5 32.♕e4 ♔g7

Black brings his king closer to the centre, preparing himself for a rook endgame.

33.♔g1 a5!



A typical break. Now that everything is ready, Black creates a new target in White's camp. White must choose between having a weak pawn on b4, or allowing ...c6-c5.

34.♔h1?!

Making things easier for Black, though the alternatives were not objectively better.

More stubborn was:

34.bxa5

But Black has good winning chances after:

34...c5!

White has better prospects after 34...♕xa5 35.♖d3 ♕d8 threatening ...c6-c5, and now: 36.♖b3! b5 37.♖b4∓

35.♖d2

Searching for counterplay with 35.♖b1 cxd4 36.♖xb7 just barely fails against 36...d3 37.♕e6 d2! (but not 37...♖f5? 38.♕d7=) 38.♕xf7† ♔h6∓ and Black is nearly winning, but I will not include any more lines as they are extremely long and quite irrelevant.

35...♕d7

Slowly preparing ...♖xd4.

If 35...cxd4?! 36.♖d3 White has chances of holding, hence White goes for:

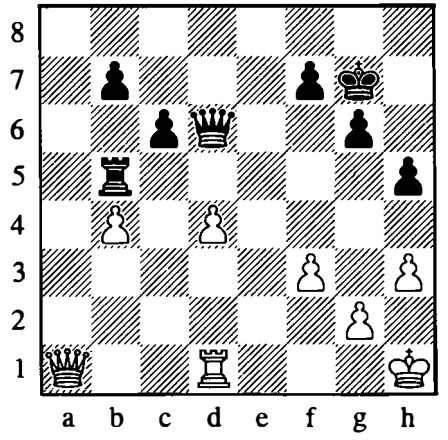
36.♖e2 cxd4 37.♖d2 d3∓

Although White's defence is very difficult to say the least.

34...axb4 35.axb4 ♕d6∓

The b4-pawn is basically lost already.

36.♕b1 ♖b5 37.♕a1



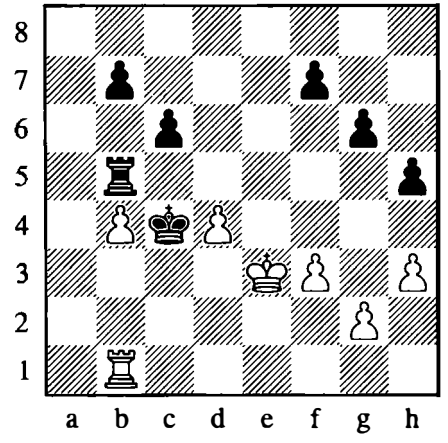
37...♔h7

More accurate was 37...f6!, heading for a queen endgame: 38.♖b1 ♖xb4 39.♖xb4 ♕xb4 40.♕a8 ♕e1† 41.♔h2 ♕e7 42.♔h1 (worse is 42.♕c8? ♕d6† 43.♔h1 b5–+) 42...♕d7∓ Black should win by pushing his b-pawn, though it requires good technique.

38.♕a2 ♔g8 39.♕a8† ♕f8?!

Black heads into a favourable rook endgame, but misses a stronger option. 39...♔g7 40.♕a1 f6! would transpose into the variation 37...f6.

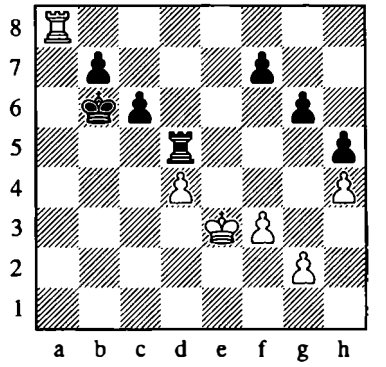
40.♕xf8† ♔xf8 41.♖b1 ♔e7 42.♔g1 ♔d6 43.♔f2 ♔d5 44.♔e3 ♔c4



Finally the b4-pawn is lost.

45.♔e4?

White misses a great defensive resource in 45.♖c1†! ♔xb4 46.h4. The game is far from over, for example: 46...♔a5!? 47.♖a1† ♔b6 48.♖a8 ♖d5∓



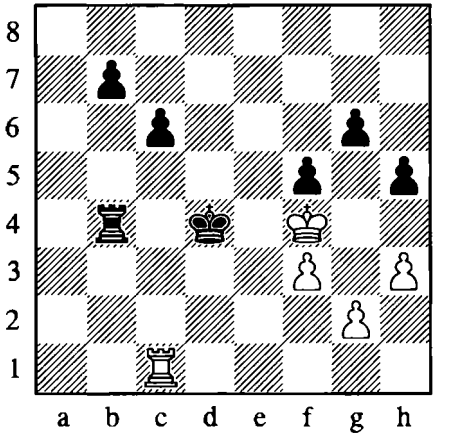
White has a difficult defence ahead of him, but all is not yet lost.

45...f5†!

Keeping control of the game.

If 45...♖xb4 then 46.♖c1†! ♔b5 47.♔e5, heading to f6 in order to capture Black's kingside pawns.

46.♔f4 ♖xb4 47.♖c1† ♔xd4–+



The rest is easy but instructive.

48.♖d1† ♔c3† 49.♔g5 ♖d4 50.♖b1 ♖d6!

This prevents any counterplay associated with ♔xg6, and wins the game nicely.

51.♖b6

51.♖xb7 does not help: 51 ...c5 will be followed by ...c4, ...♔d2, ...c3-c2 winning.

51...♔d4 52.g4 hxg4 53.hxg4 fxg4 54.fxg4 ♔d5 55.♖xb7 c5 56.♔f4 c4 57.♔e3 c3!

Right on time! White can do nothing to stop the pawn.

58.♖c7

58.♔d3? loses to 58...♔c6†.

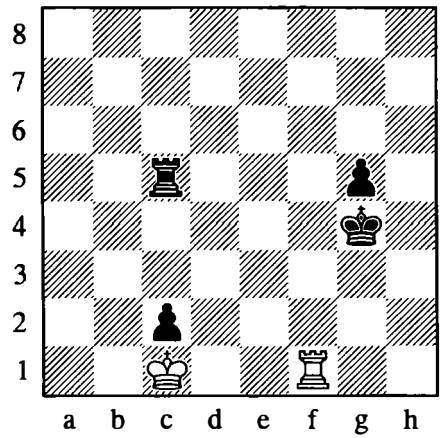
58...♖c6! 59.♖d7†

The pawn endgame is lost after 59.♖xc6 ♔xc6 60.♔d3 ♔d5 61.♔xc3 ♔e4.

59...♔e5 60.♖d1 c2 61.♖c1 g5 62.♔d2 ♔f4 63.♖f1†

63.♖g1 c1=♕†! and wins.

63...♔xg4 64.♔c1 ♖c5!



White cannot prevent the promotion of the g-pawn.

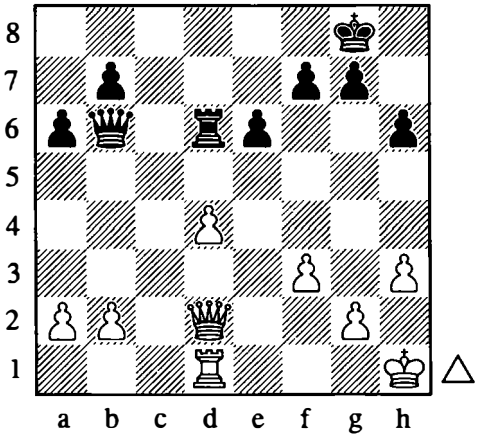
0–1

Final remarks

1. The standard plan ...♕d8 and ...♖d5 forces White to play b2-b4, in order to prevent ...c6-c5 winning a pawn.
2. Once b2-b4 had been played, the break ...a7-a5 forces the creation of a weak b4-pawn, or allows Black to finally achieve ...c6-c5.
3. The initial position looks like just a very slight advantage for Black, but in fact White lost the game almost without making a further mistake.
4. It should be noted that this version of the isolani is slightly different from previous examples, as Black had a pawn on the c-file, rather than the e-file.

Short comment between games

What would have happened if Black had the standard e-pawn instead of the c-pawn?



The position is essentially the same, just replacing a c6-pawn with an e6-pawn, and again the threat of ...♕d8, ...♖d5 and ...e6-e5 is strong. In the previous game White had to play b2-b4. By analogy, in this position White should play:

1.f4 ♕d8 2.♔g1 h5

Another plan is 2...♖d5 3.♕f2 ♕d7 4.♖d2 f6, insisting on ...e6-e5 to win the d4-pawn. After 5.♖d1 though, it is not so easy to break with

5...e5, due to: 6.fxe5 fxe5 7.♖f1! Black must settle for a draw with: 7...♕e7 (but not 7...exd4? due to 8.♕f8† ♔h7 9.♖f7+–) 8.dxe5 ♖xe5=

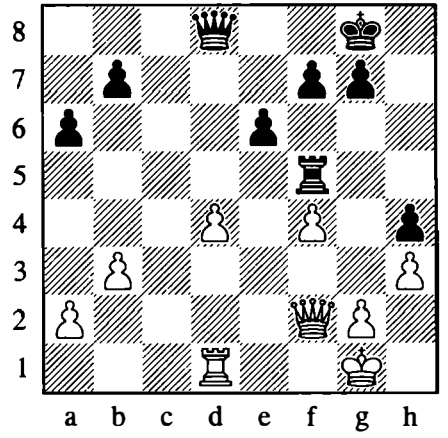
3.♕b4 ♕d7 4.♕c3 ♖d5 5.♕d2

Protecting the f4-pawn with 5.g3 creates further weaknesses, and can be met by 5...h4! 6.g4 ♖d6!?∓ followed by ...♖c6 and a dangerous penetration down the c-file, since White's king is very exposed.

5...h4

Preventing g2-g3.

6.♕f2 ♕d8 7.b3 ♖f5∓



Followed by ...♕f6 or ...♕d6; White's defence will be difficult.

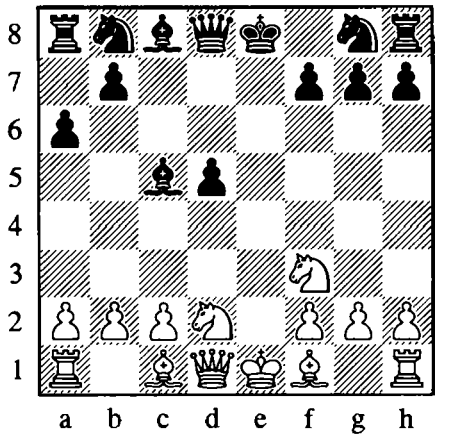
In the next game, we will study how the isolani version present in the previous game could arise from the opening, and how a typical middlegame may develop.

Pavel Simacek – Baadur Jobava

Legnica 2013

Learning objective: This game illustrates how dangerous the black isolani can be when White lacks his e-pawn.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♘gf3 a6 5.exd5 exd5 6.dxc5 ♗xc5



We have reached a far less common version of the isolani. White usually has a pawn on the e-file, instead of the c-pawn. Many of the typical plans are still the same, but the lack of White's e-pawn makes his king far more vulnerable, particularly on the a7-g1 diagonal.

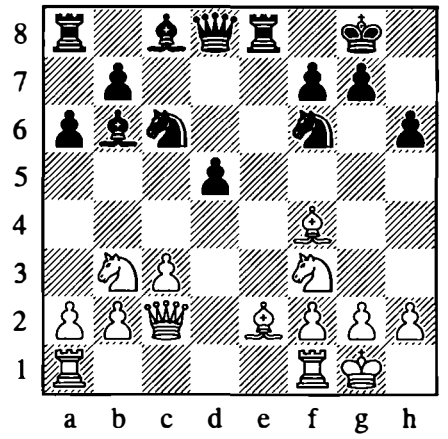
7.♘b3 ♗b6 8.♗e2?!

This development is rather imprecise, since it blocks the e-file, thus preventing a future ♖e1 followed by ♗e3, which would neutralize the action of the bishop on b6.

Correct was 8.♗d3 ♘e7 9.0–0 ♗g4 10.♖e1 h6 11.h3 ♗h5 12.c3 ♘bc6 13.♗e3± Karpov – Vaganian, Skopje 1976.

8.♕e2†!? inviting an early queen trade, also deserves attention.

8...♘f6 9.0–0 h6 10.♗f4 ♘c6 11.c3 0–0 12.♕c2 ♖e8∓



Black has developed his pieces naturally, and has a very pleasant position.

13.h3?

This is a serious mistake, wasting a move and weakening the kingside. White probably wanted to prevent ...♗g4, but there are much bigger problems to worry about, as we will see.

It was necessary to reorganize the pieces with 13.♗d3 ♘e4 (13...♗g4 14.♘fd4! – piece trades do not benefit Black) 14.♖ae1 ♕f6 15.♗e3 though after 15...♗c7∓ Black has a comfortable position.

13...♘e4!∓

Black intends to follow up with ...♕f6 building a strong kingside initiative. White already faces severe problems such as the strong pressure on the a7-g1 diagonal.

14.♘bd4

Hoping to block Black's strong bishop.

The natural 14.♖ad1 fails to 14...♕f6 15.♗c1 ♗xh3! winning due to the hanging queen on c2: 16.gxh3 ♕g6† 17.♔h2 ♗c7† 18.♔h1 ♘xf2†! 19.♖xf2 ♕xc2

14.♗h2 ♕f6∓ leaves White under definite pressure; one threat would be 15...♗xh3. Notice how strong the black bishop on b6 is.

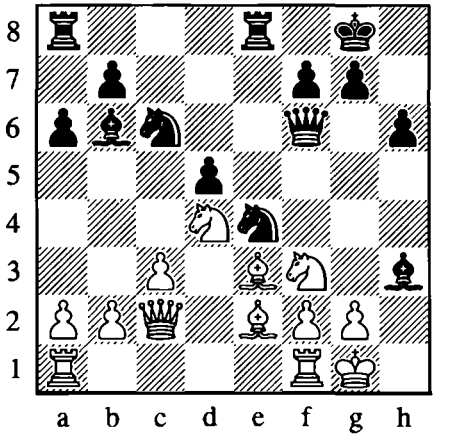
14...♕f6 15.♗e3

White's seemingly solid position will fall apart after Black's strong reply.

Black is simply a pawn up after: 15.♕c1 ♘xd4 16.cxd4 ♗xd4 17.♘xd4 ♕xd4∓

15...♗xh3!–+

This typical tactical blow exemplifies how quickly Black's attack can develop in this version of the isolani. White's pieces cannot cope with so much pressure.



16.gxh3?!

Making things easier. Better was 16.♕b3 ♘xd4 17.cxd4 ♗g4, though Black is a clear pawn up.

16...♕g6† 17.♔h2

17.♔h1? ♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗xd4! Black regains the piece, since White's queen is hanging: 19.♗xd4? ♘xf2†! 20.♖xf2 ♕xc2–+

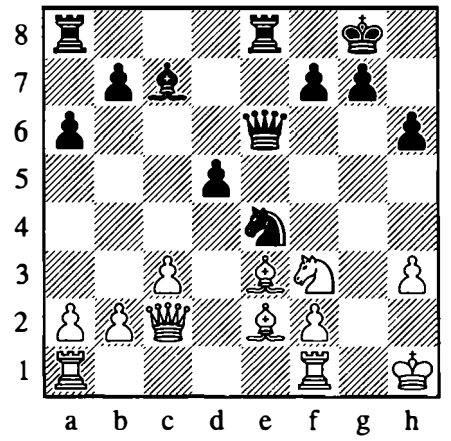
17...♗c7† 18.♔h1 ♘xd4 19.♘xd4 ♕d6!

Threatening checkmate on h2 and forcing the knight to abandon the d4-square, thus leaving the queen on c2 defenceless again.

20.♘f3

No better is 20.f4 ♘g3†.

20...♕e6



White resigned, since material loss is unavoidable. 21.♘g1 (21.♔g2 ♕g6† transposing to 21.♘g1, after 23...♕g6†) 21...♕e5! 22.♘f3 (22.f4 ♘g3†–+) 22...♕f5 23.♔g2 ♕g6† 24.♘g5 (24.♔h1? ♘g3† 25.fxg3 ♕xc2–+) 24...♗d8 Followed by ..♗xg5 winning easily.
0–1

Final remarks

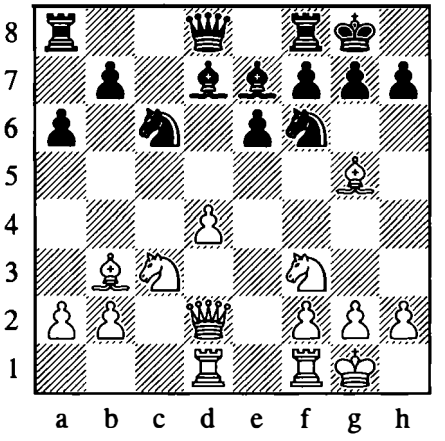
1. White should have neutralized Black's bishop on b6 with ♖e1 and ♗e3, as mentioned in the note to move 8.
2. Black's initiative develops so easily that one may wonder if this version of the isolani is simply inferior for White. This is not necessarily true, though White requires extra care and imprecisions prove more costly, mainly because the king is more vulnerable.

Etienne Bacrot – Romain Edouard

Caen 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates kingside attacking chances in a standard isolani position.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 dxc4 4.e3 e6 5.♗xc4 a6 6.0–0 c5 7.♗b3 ♘c6 8.♘c3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗e7 10.♗g5 0–0 11.♕d2 ♗d7 12.♖ad1



We have reached a standard position, and I should emphasize that great accuracy in calculation is needed to seize the initiative.

12...♘a5!

By pushing White's bishop away from b3, Black reduces the chances of a potential d4-d5 break.

The bishop cannot be chased away with 12...h6? because of 13.♗xh6! gxh6 14.♕xh6 when Black is lost, in view of the threats ♘g5 and ♘ce4, or simply d4-d5 opening the lines for checkmate. An illustrative variation is: 14...♖e8 15.d5 exd5 (if 15...♗f8 16.♕g5†+– White regains the piece with dividends) 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xd5 Threatening ♕g6 and if 17...♗f5 18.♕h5! and wins.

The normal move 12...♖c8?! is met by: 13.d5! exd5 14.♘xd5 ♗e6 15.♘xf6† ♗xf6 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.♕e3±

13.♗c2 ♘c4 14.♕e2

Fighting for the initiative, Bacrot is willing to go into complications if necessary.

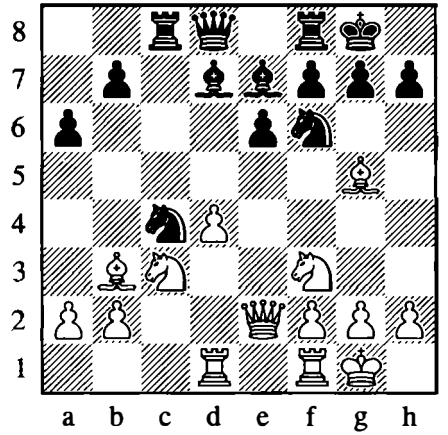
The passive 14.♕c1 gives Black a comfortable game: 14...♖c8 15.♖fe1 ♖e8=

14...♖c8?!

This imprecision will cost Black the initiative.

Black should have accepted the challenge with: 14...♘xb2! 15.♖c1!? (15.♖b1 does not work owing to 15...♖c8! 16.♖xb2 ♖xc3∓; 15.♗xh7† ♘xh7 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♕xb2 ♖ac8=) 15...♖c8 16.♘e5 The game is unclear, though chances are approximately level.

15.♗b3!



15...b5

As Edouard points out, the key to White's 15th move is that 15...♘a5?! allows 16.d5!. Now if 16...♘xb3?! 17.d6! ♘a5 18.dxe7 ♕xe7 19.♘d5!, Black is nearly lost, for example 19...♕d8? (19...♕c5 20.b4±) 20.♘xf6† gxf6 21.♗h6 ♖e8 22.♘e5!+– threatening ♕g4† then mate on g7, as well as ♖xd7.

Instead 16...exd5 17.♗xd5± when Black is under serious pressure.

After 15...♘b6 16.♘e5± White may proceed with ♖d3-h3 with a kingside attack.

16.♘e5 ♘b6

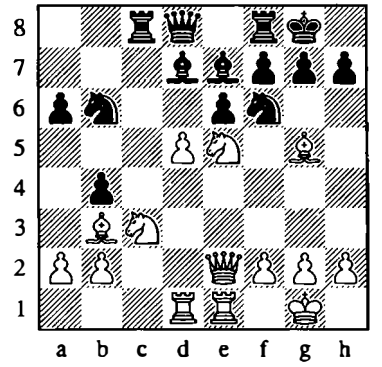
If 16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♘e8 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.♖d4± White maintains an advantage by controlling the d-file. He may attempt an attack with ♕h5 and ♖h4, or pressure the queenside with ♖fd1 and a2-a4.

17.♖fe1

The d4-d5 theme is still in the air, and this move supports it by creating indirect pressure against the bishop on e7.

17...h6

17...b4?! is met by 18.d5!.



This break proves effective once again: 18...exd5 (worse is 18...bxc3? 19.dxe6 fxe6 20.♘xd7 ♘bxd7 21.♗xe6† ♔h8 22.♗xd7+–) 19.♘xd7 ♕xd7 20.♕xe7 ♕xe7 21.♖xe7 bxc3 22.bxc3 ♖xc3 23.♖a7± The endgame is very difficult for Black to hold.

18.♗xh6!?

White embarks on a very interesting piece sacrifice.

The option 18.♗h4 also deserves attention. Black does not have an easy way out of the pressure he is under, for example 18...♘fd5?! attempting to trade pieces off, fails to: 19.♘xd5 ♘xd5 (19...♗xh4?? 20.♘xb6+–) 20.♗xd5 ♗xh4 21.♗b7 ♖b8 (or 21...♖c7 22.♗xa6±) 22.♗c6! The key move. 22...♗c8 (22...♗xc6?! 23.♘xc6+–) 23.d5!± Opening the game when Black is not ready to respond effectively.

18.♗xf6 Generally, trading pieces does not help the side playing with an isolated pawn. 18...♗xf6 19.♕e4 ♕e7 Black seems to be holding, though White's position remains slightly preferable.

18...gxh6

The intermediate move 18...b4? fails to: 19.d5! exd5 (19...bxc3?! 20.dxe6 fxe6 21.♘xd7+–) 20.♘xd5 ♘fxd5 21.♗xd5 gxh6 22.♘xd7 ♘xd7 23.♕xe7+–

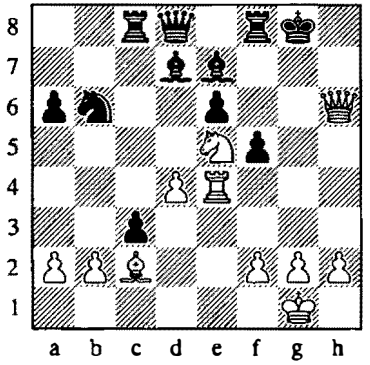
19.♖d3

The position is rather unclear, though approximately balanced.

As Edouard suggests, regaining the piece directly with 19.d5 exd5 20.♘xd7 (20.♘xd5? does not work due to 20...♘bxd5 21.♗xd5 ♗b4!–+ followed by ♕e7 when White's attack is over) 20...♕xd7 21.♕xe7 ♕xe7 22.♖xe7 does not give an advantage to White, since after 22...♖fd8 Black obtains sufficient counterplay with ...♘c4.

19...♔h8

An interesting variation is 19...b4!? 20.♖g3† ♔h8 21.♗c2 when White has a nice attack, for example: 21...bxc3? (21...♘c4!?∞ gives a better fight) 22.♕e3 ♘g8 23.♖xg8†! ♔xg8 24.♕xh6 f5 25.♖e4!!+–

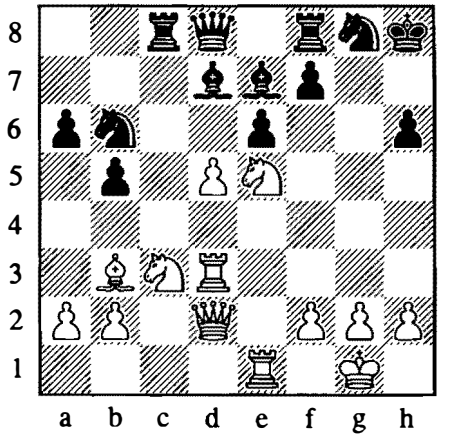


Threatening ♖g4† winning; the rook is untouchable, as after 25...fxe4? 26.♕g6† ♔h8 27.♗xe4, checkmate is unstoppable.

20.♕d2

It was possible to regain the piece immediately with 20.d5 exd5 21.♘xd7 ♕xd7 (instead 21...♘bxd7 22.♘xd5! ♘xd5 23.♖xd5 yields a dangerous initiative) 22.♕xe7 ♕xe7 23.♖xe7 with a slightly better endgame for White.

20...♘g8 21.d5



21...♘c4

Another option was 21...exd5 which leads to the forced line: 22.♘xd5 ♘c4 23.♕c3 ♘xe5 24.♕xe5† ♗f6 25.♘xf6 ♘xf6 26.♖ed1 ♖e8 27.♖xd7 ♕xd7 28.♕xf6† ♔h7 29.g3!? when the position is dynamically balanced.

22.♗xc4 bxc4 23.♖d4 ♗c5??

A blunder in time trouble.

It was difficult to find the only move 23...♕e8! after which White has plenty of choices leading to unclear play, for example 24.♘e4!? when White maintains many potential threats, and has enough compensation for the piece.

24.dxe6

White is just winning now.

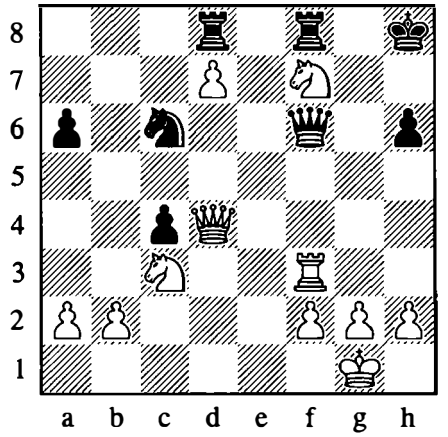
24...♗xd4 25.♕xd4 ♕f6

25...♗xe6? 26.♘xf7† wins Black's queen.

26.exd7 ♖cd8 27.♖e3

White wants to push Black's queen away from the a1-h8 diagonal.

27...♘e7 28.♖f3 ♘c6 29.♘xf7†!



The endgame is lost after 29...♖xf7 30.♕xf6† ♖xf6 31.♖xf6 and White comes out with at least three extra pawns.

1–0

Final remarks

1. The break d4-d5 was a predominant theme in this game; which prevented many of Black's desired moves.
2. The alternative 18.♗h4 would have given a pleasant, slow-paced but steady advantage.
3. Although the piece sacrifice 18.♗xh6 only gives equality, it is justified in practice, as White's attack was far easier to play than Black's defence. In many crucial variations Black was forced to find a series of only moves in order to survive.

Nikita Vitiugov – Viktor Bologan

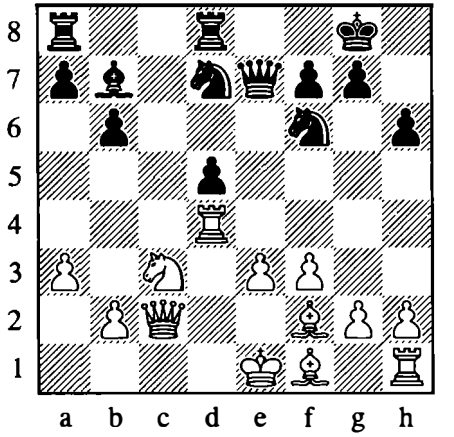
Eilat 2012

Learning objectives:
1. This game illustrates how important it is to have the good bishop when you have an isolani. 2. Without this bishop it is extremely difficult to create counterplay even in the middlegame.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 0–0 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♕xc3 b6 7.♗g5 ♗b7 8.e3 d6 9.♘e2 ♘bd7 10.♕c2 c5 11.♖d1 ♕e7 12.♘c3 cxd4 13.♖xd4 h6 14.♗h4 ♖fd8 15.f3

White intends to proceed with ♗e2, 0–0, and ♖fd1, possibly followed by e3-e4, obtaining a favourable version of the typical Hedgehog structure, which is studied in detail later in this book.

15...d5 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♗f2



We have reached the position of interest. Based on the previous games we might think there is generally enough counterplay to compensate for the isolated d5-pawn, but this game proves the opposite. The key factor is the lack of Black's dark-squared bishop, which is often associated with threats along the b8-h2 diagonal. In this game, Black finds himself unable to produce sufficient counterplay, and must passively wait to suffer a painful defeat.

17...♘c5 18.♗e2 ♘e6 19.♖d2 a6

Getting rid of the d5 weakness with 19...d4?! will not give Black enough counterplay after: 20.exd4 ♘f4 21.0–0 ♘6d5 22.♖e1 ♕g5 23.♗f1 ♘h3† 24.♔h1±

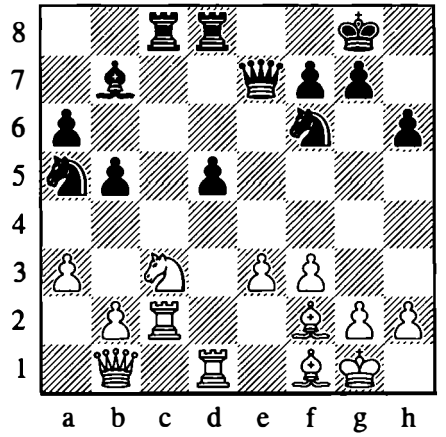
20.0–0 b5 21.♖fd1±

White's advantage is quite obvious. The ...d5-d4 break is impossible and Black is tied to the defence of the weak d5-pawn.

21...♖ac8 22.♕b1 ♘c5 23.♗f1

White frees the e2-square to rearrange his pieces with ♘e2-d4, controlling many key squares.

23...♘b3 24.♖c2 ♘a5



The previous knight moves make good sense. Since the key e4-square has been taken away with f2-f3, Black's natural reaction is to place a knight on c4, pressuring e3.

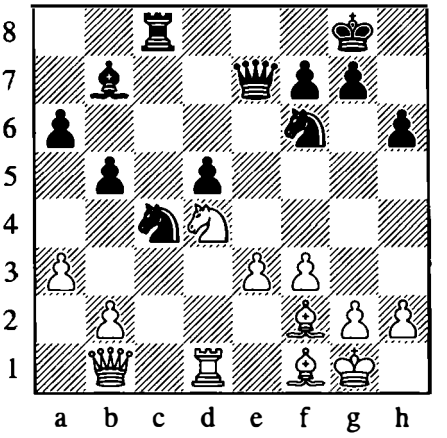
25.♘e2

25.a4!? was also possible, pressuring Black's queenside: 25...bxa4 (or 25...b4 26.♘e2 ♖xc2 27.♕xc2 ♖c8 28.♕b1 ♘c4 29.♘d4± when there is little counterplay and the weaknesses on a6, b4, and d5 are hard to deal with) 26.♘xa4 ♖xc2 27.♕xc2 ♖c8 28.♕d3 ♕b4 29.♕d4± Black's position is quite delicate.

25...♖xc2

The try 25...♘c4 is met by 26.♕c1± which is similar to the game.

26.♕xc2 ♖c8 27.♕b1 ♘c4 28.♘d4



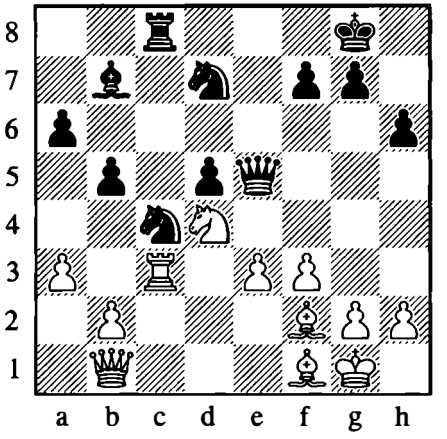
White's pieces work together in harmony, while Black's pieces lack ways to improve.

28...♕e5

28...♘xe3? fails to 29.♖e1.

An alternative is 28...♘d7 but White is better after 29.♖c1 ♘db6 30.♖c2± followed by ♕c1 preparing b2-b3, which is analogous to the game.

29.♖d3 ♘d7 30.♖c3

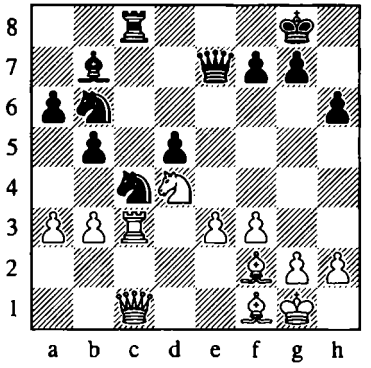


White prepares the invasion along the c-file, and Black does not have a satisfactory reply.

30...♖e8?!

It was preferable to fight for the c-file with: 30...♘db6

Although after:
31.♕c1 ♕e7 32.b3!



Black's position is difficult to hold, for example: 32...♘e5

32...♘xa3?! 33.♖xc8† ♘xc8 (33...♗xc8? 34.♕c6 ♕d8 35.♕c5 and the knight on a3 is lost) 34.♘f5 And White regains the pawn favourably after: 34...♕d7 (34...♕f8? runs into a nice tactical refutation: 35.♕c7! ♗a8 36.♕xc8) 35.♘xh6† gxh6 36.♕xa3±
33.♗e1 ♕d7 34.♖xc8† ♘xc8 35.♗b4±

31.♕c1

Defending the a3-pawn and preparing the invasion with b2-b3 followed by ♖c7.

31...♘f8 32.b3 ♘b6 33.♗g3 ♕f6 34.♖c7 ♗a8?

This makes things easier.

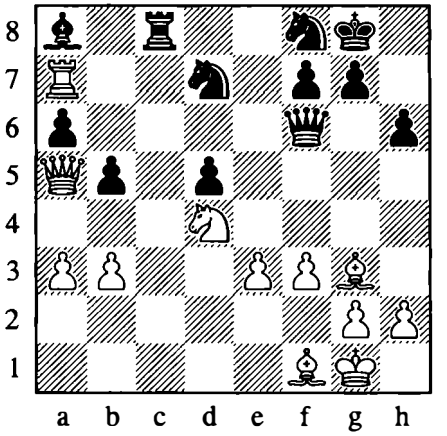
34...♖c8 was the last attempt to fight, but after 35.♕c5 h5 36.♕e7! ♕xe7 37.♖xe7 Black's position is very close to lost, for example 37...♘fd7? 38.a4! followed by a4-a5 winning a piece.

35.♖a7+–

Black's position collapses; both the a6- and b5-pawns will be lost.

35...♖c8 36.♖c7 ♖e8 37.♖a7 ♖c8 38.♕d2 ♘bd7 39.♕a5

Necessary to capture the a6- and b5-pawns.



39...♖c1

39...♘c5 does not help due to: 40.b4 ♘cd7 41.♖xa6+–

40.♖xa8

White is a whole piece up, and the rest is easy.

40...♕g6 41.e4 dxe4 42.♕d2 ♖a1 43.♘c2 ♖xf1† 44.♔xf1 ♕c6 45.♖d8 exf3 46.gxf3 ♕xf3† 47.♔g1 ♕c6 48.♘e3 ♕b6 49.♕xd7 ♕xe3† 50.♗f2 ♕c1† 51.♔g2 ♕xa3 52.♕d6 1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's biggest strategic mistake was accepting an isolani without having his good bishop. It is likely that Bologan did not properly assess how little counterplay he would have.
2. White's piece arrangement with pawns on e3/f3, ♗f1, ♗f2 and ♘d4 was ideal. It covered most essential squares while maintaining a solid and dynamic position.
3. Black did not have a good response against the plan ♖c3, ♕c1 and b2-b3 followed by penetrating down the c-file. Therefore, Black's position was lost in practice ever since move 30. This means a defence was only possible assuming near-perfect play, which even a top player like Bologan was unable to deliver.

Magnus Carlsen – Wang Yue

Linares 2009

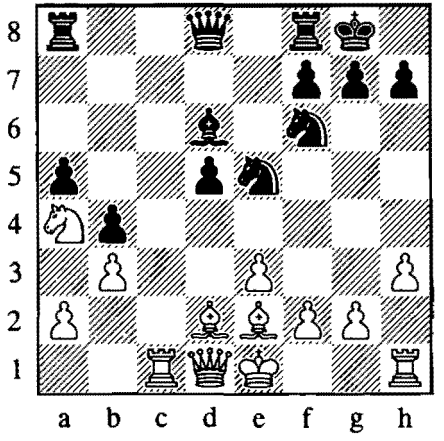
Learning objective:
In contrast to the previous game, the player who has an isolani can obtain good counterplay if he possesses his good bishop. This is true despite already having traded two minor pieces.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 b5 6.b3 ♗g4 7.♗d2 ♘bd7 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 b4 10.♘a4 e5!

Black correctly converts the game into an isolani battle where he will have enough counterplay. Notice how far White's knight is from the ideal d4-square.

Instead 10...e6 11.♗d3 a5 12.♖c1 ♗d6 13.0–0 0–0 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♖c6± gives White a pleasingly dominating position with little black counterplay.

11.♖c1 ♗d6 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♕d1 0–0 15.♗e2 a5



We have reached the position of interest, where White has the pair of bishops and a healthy pawn structure. Black needs to arrange his pieces well in order to achieve good counterplay.

16.♖c2 ♕e7 17.♗c1

By following up with ♗b2, White wants to improve his bishop, as it was useless on d2.

Castling first with 17.0–0 ♖ad8 is likely to transpose to the game, as White will have to play ♗c1 sooner or later.

17...♖ad8 18.♗b2 ♘g6 19.0–0 ♘e4 20.♗d4

This blockades the d5-pawn and prepares ♗b6 pressuring Black's queenside.

20...♘h4

Black's knights are ideally placed on e4 and h4, pressuring the kingside and inviting White to weaken his position. Black has full compensation for his isolated pawn.

21.♗d3

If White simply intends to grab some material with:

21.♗b6

Black can give up an exchange for activity with:

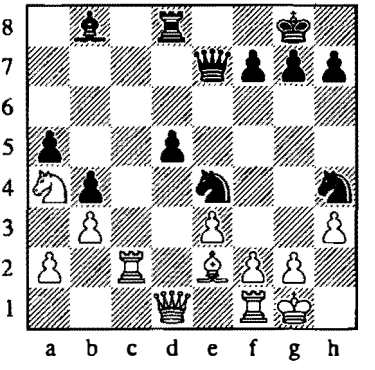
21...♗b8!?

21...♕g5!? also deserves attention.

22.♗xd8

White must accept the challenge, otherwise ...♖d6 will follow: 22.♔h1? ♖d6∓ with a dangerous attack.

22...♖xd8



Here Black has enough threats to compensate for the exchange sacrifice, say after:

23.♗d3

Or 23.♕c1 ♕d6 24.f4 ♗a7! and White is tied up: 25.♗d3 (25.♖c8? ♗xe3†!–+) 25...♘f5

26.♖f3 ♘xe3 27.♖xe3 ♕xf4 28.♖ce2 f5! This curious position is dynamically balanced, for example 29.♗xe4 fxe4 30.♔h1 ♖f8 31.♕e1 ♖c8∞ when it is unclear how White may release his pieces.

23...♕d6 24.f4

But not: 24.g3? ♘xg3!∓

24...♘f5 25.♗xe4 ♘xe3 26.♗xh7† ♔xh7 27.♕d3† ♕g6 28.♕xg6† fxg6=

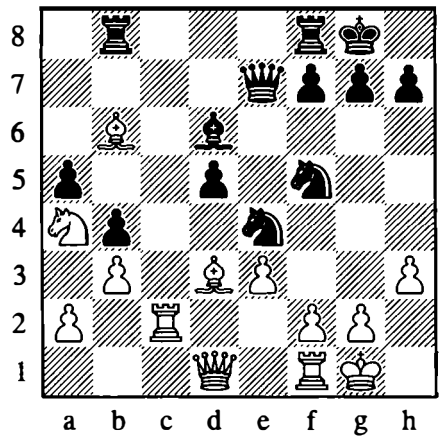
21...♘f5

Black wants to get rid of White's strong bishop on d4.

Worthy of consideration is 21...♗b8!? with kingside threats, such as ...♕d6 or ...f7-f5-f4, e.g. 22.♖e1 f5 23.f4 g5!⇄ with a dangerous kingside initiative.

21...♕g5? is simply answered by 22.♕g4! when Black is nearly lost after 22...♕xg4 (or 22...♕h6 23.♗xg7! ♕xg7 24.♕xh4±) 23.hxg4± as the pawns on a5 and d5 are very weak.

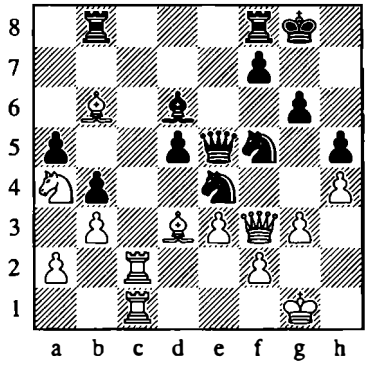
22.♗b6 ♖b8



23.♗xe4?!

The materialistic 23.♗xa5?! runs into tactical problems with 23...♘xf2! 24.♖fxf2 ♘xe3 25.♗xh7† ♔xh7 26.♕d3† ♔g8 when Black's position is preferable, owing to his superior piece coordination.

Better was: 23.♕f3 g6 24.♖fc1 ♕e5 25.g3 h5 (aiming for ...h5-h4) 26.h4!±



Now Black's counterplay is reasonably under control, therefore White's position is slightly preferable.

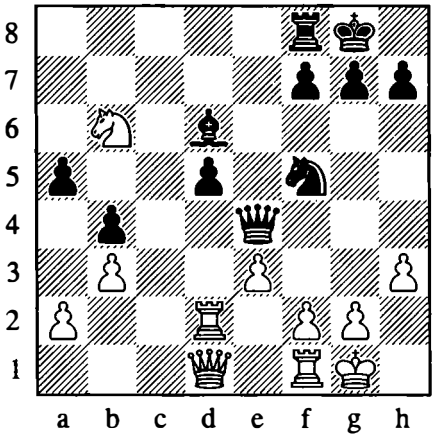
23...♕xe4

White gave up the pair of bishops to trade off Black's powerful knight, but the counterplay still persists.

24.♖d2

If 24.♕e2 ♘h4 25.f3 ♕g6 Black remains threatening, for example 26.f4 ♘f5 27.♕d3 ♖xb6! 28.♘xb6 ♘xe3! regaining the exchange: 29.♕xg6 fxg6 30.♖c6 ♘xf1 31.♖xd6 ♘g3 With level chances.

24...♖xb6! 25.♘xb6



25...♕e5

As Giri points out, Black can force a draw with: 25...♘xe3 26.fxe3 ♕xe3† 27.♖df2 ♕g3 (another option was 27...♕xb6 28.♔h1 ♕e3 29.♕f3 ♕e5 30.g3=) 28.♖e2 ♕h2† 29.♔f2 ♕g3†=

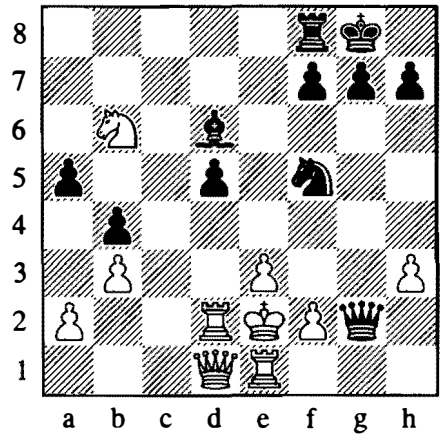
26.♖e1?

White commits a serious mistake.

The only defence was 26.g3 ♘xg3 27.♘xd5 ♘xf1 (or 27...♘e2†!? 28.♔g2 ♕g5† 29.♔f3 ♕h5† 30.♔g2 ♕g5†=) 28.♔xf1 ♖d8 when the position is approximately equal.

26...♕h2† 27.♔f1 ♕h1† 28.♔e2 ♕xg2∓

Black's attack is far more important than being an exchange down.



29.♖xd5?

Another mistake in a difficult position.

The only defence was the computer-like move 29.♔d3! after which 29...♘h4 30.♕g4! ♘f3 31.♔e2 (the queen cannot be taken with 31.♕xg2?? because of 31...♘xe1† 32.♔e2 ♘xg2–+) 31...♕xg4 32.hxg4 ♘xd2 33.♔xd2 f5!∓ and Black will have very good winning chances by pushing his h-pawn.

29...♘g3† 30.♔d3 ♗c7!–+

White is an exchange up, but this is definitely not enough to compensate for the exposure of the white king. The position is technically won for Black, and the rest of the game is quite unrelated to the topic of this chapter, but I include it since I believe it is just a fun game to watch.

31.fxg3 ♗xb6 32.♔c4 ♖b8!

Anticipating White's king will go to b5; the threat is ...♕e4 followed by a discovered check.

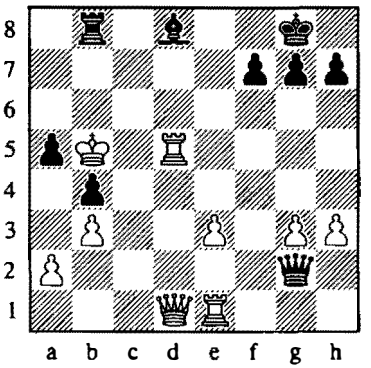
33.♔b5

No better was 33.e4 ♕xg3 followed by ...♕c7 or ...♕xh3 winning.

33...♗d4†?!

An understandable human imprecision.

The computer move 33...♗d8†!!



...wins right away, for example: 34.♔c6 (34.♔a4?? ♕xa2#) 34...♕e4 35.♕d4 ♕e6† 36.♖d6 ♕c8† 37.♔d5 ♖b5† 38.♔e4 ♕f5#

34.♔c4 ♗f6

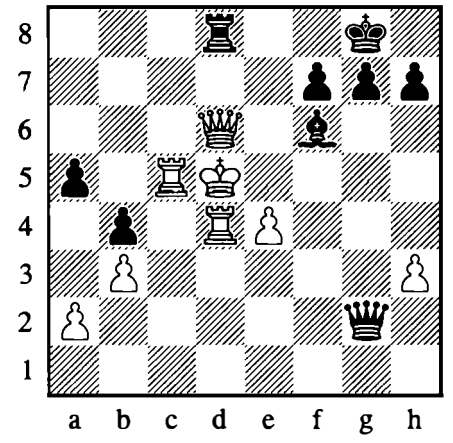
Better was 34...♗b6! hoping for another chance to find ...♗d8†!!.

35.♕d3 ♕xg3 36.♖d1 ♕c7† 37.♖c5 ♕b7 38.♕d6

A better defence was 38.♕d7!.

38...♕e4† 39.♖d4 ♕c2† 40.♔d5 ♕g2† 41.e4 ♖d8!–+

Finally the game becomes clear and the rest is easy for Black, owing to the extra pawns and White's exposed king.



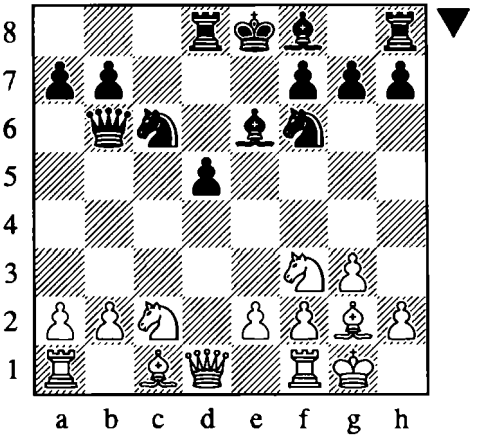
42.♕xd8† ♗xd8 43.♖c8 g6 44.♖xd8† ♔g7 45.♖d3 ♕c2 46.♔d4 a4 47.bxa4 ♕xa2 48.♔c5 b3 49.♖b8 b2 50.♖db3 ♕xa4 51.♖xb2 ♕xe4 52.♖8b3 ♔h6 53.♖c3 f5 54.♖bb3 ♕e5† 55.♔c4 ♔h5 56.♔d3 ♔h4 57.♔d2 f4 58.♖f3 g5 59.♖fd3 ♕c5 60.♖bc3 ♕f2† 61.♔d1 ♕f1† 62.♔d2 ♕g2† 63.♔d1 ♕e4 64.♔d2 h5 0–1

Final remarks

1. Black's decision to accept an isolani was based on two main factors: White's knight would not be useful in an isolani position; Black was rid of his bad bishop and had a good bishop to create critical threats down the b8-h2 diagonal.
2. Despite the comment above, White was doing okay before the crucial tactical mistake 26.♖e1. Without this mistake the most likely result would have been a draw.

Final Comment: Isolani on the Fifth Rank

The position in the diagram below occurred in **Narciso Dublan – Gonzales Vidal**, Badalona 2005.



In this position Black continued with the strong:

11...d4!

Now the game takes a somewhat different character. The reader should take a moment to analyze this position, and come to realize Black's position is the more comfortable already, since his isolated pawn is by no means vulnerable on the d4-square, while White's forces are severely constrained. Black will simply proceed by developing his pieces and exerting pressure down the e-file.

The alternative 11...♘e4 12.♘cd4 ♗c5 13.♗e3 0–0 14.♖c1 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 gives White a comfortable position with favourable long-term chances since Black's good bishop will be traded.

12.♘ce1

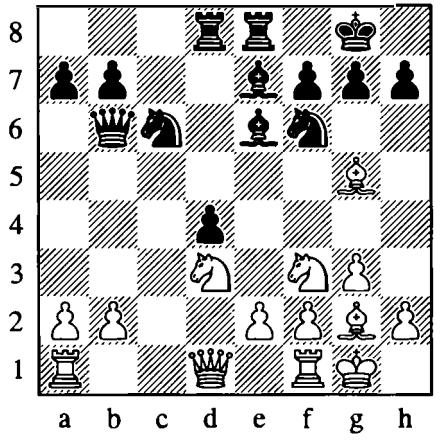
Heading towards d3; it is necessary to prevent the d4-pawn from advancing further with a potential ...d4-d3 break, which would unleash the potential of Black's better-placed minor pieces.

The careless 12.b3 ♗c5 13.♗b2 0–0 14.♕d3 is refuted by 14...♗d5! 15.♖ad1 ♗e4 16.♕d2 d3! opening up the position with winning threats: 17.exd3 ♗xd3 18.♗xf6 (or 18.♖fe1? ♘e4) 18...gxf6 19.♖fe1 ♘b4! 20.♘xb4 ♗xb4 21.♕f4 ♗xe1–+

12...♗e7 13.♘d3

Unlike the usual knight on d4, which blocks the isolani and controls the board, this knight on d3 is rather passive.

13...0–0 14.♗g5 ♖fe8∓



Black mobilizes his pieces with ease, while the d4-pawn constrains White's forces.

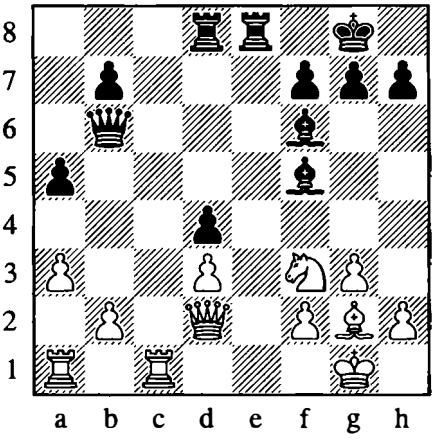
15.♗xf6

An alternative was 15.♖e1 h6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6∓ but now White does not have useful moves.

15...♗xf6 16.♕d2 a5 17.♖fc1 ♘b4!? 18.a3

Or 18.♘xb4 ♕xb4 19.♕xb4 axb4 (threatening ...d4-d3) 20.♘e1 ♗g4 when the e2-pawn is lost and Black has a pleasant edge.

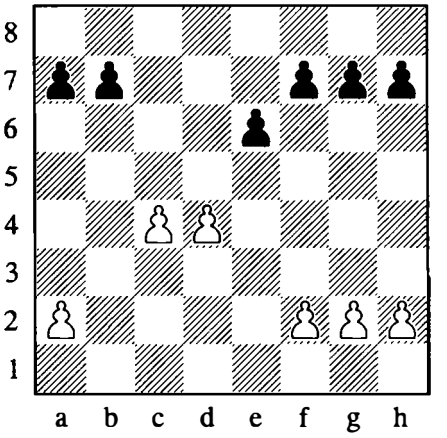
18...♘xd3 19.exd3 ♗f5



The pawn structure has been transformed, and the rest of the game bears no relevance to this chapter. What is important is that Black had a pleasant advantage and won very convincingly. This short fragment teaches us how difficult it is to play against an isolated queen pawn once it has reached the fifth rank.

Chapter 2

Hanging Pawns



The 'hanging pawns' structure arises in many openings and is closely related to the isolani. In fact, most hanging pawns arise from an isolani position, in which Black trades his knight on d5 for White's knight on c3. Later, White is likely to advance c3-c4 yielding the position in the diagram. Similar to the previous chapter, this structure is equally likely to arise with either colour, but for the moment we will assume it is White who has the hanging pawns. In general, White has better middlegame prospects due to his control of central squares and his spatial edge. Black, on the other hand, should aim for an endgame or a simplified position in which these pawns are likely to become a liability. In particular, if these pawns become blocked by Black's pieces, then they will become a crucial weakness accounting for an essentially lost position. Now, let's discuss specific ideas for both sides.

White's plans

1. Create a kingside attack. Most plans will include the moves ♘e5, ♗c2, ♕d3, and a likely rook transfer through the third rank, say with ♖e1-e3-h3.
2. Break in the centre with d4-d5, either to open lines for attack, or to create a powerful passed pawn on the d-file.

Black's plans

1. Trade off pieces attempting to neutralize the attack.
2. Pressure the central pawns, block them if possible.
3. Break the hanging pawns, either with ...b6-b5 or ...e6-e5. These breaks are not easy to carry out, especially because an experienced player will try and prevent them at all costs. However, if they can be accomplished they are generally very strong, as they weaken those squares covered by the hanging pawns, and often force White to accept an isolani under very unfavourable circumstances.

As the reader will notice, many ideas are shared between this structure and the previous one, and this should not be a surprise. These structures are members of the same family in a general sense. They are both open positions in which White enjoys a pleasant spatial advantage at the cost of some structural instability. Overall, I would say the standard hanging pawns position offers level chances and a complex game with winning chances for both sides. Precise calculation is often required to carry out (or neutralize) the attack and to find the right timing for the central breaks mentioned above.

The first two games in this chapter will illustrate

how White may successfully break in the centre with d4-d5. In the first example this break will create a decisive attack due to the opening of lines, while the second example will illustrate the power of a passed pawn advancing down the d-file. The third game is an illustration of White's attacking potential within a modified structure which often arises from the hanging pawns.

The last three games in the chapter illustrate (with reversed colours) how Black may play against the hanging pawns. The first of these games illustrates the blocking of the hanging pawns, while the last two exemplify the breaks ...e6-e5 and ...b6-b5 respectively.

Henrique Mecking – Sandro Mareco

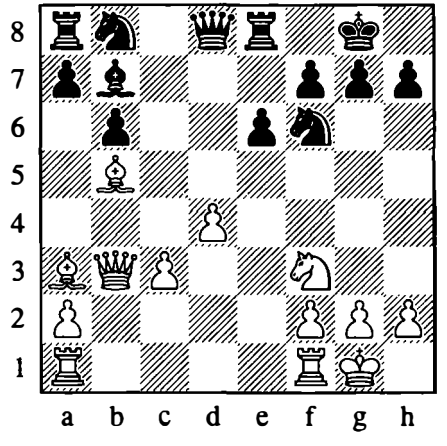
Campinas 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates the powerful d4-d5 break and the strong attack White obtains from it.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♗d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0–0 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♗xc4 b6 10.♕b3 ♗xc3 11.bxc3

We have reached the position of interest. This is a nice version of the hanging pawns for White, as he has the pair of bishops in an open position.

11...♗b7 12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♗b5



13...♗c6 14.♗e2

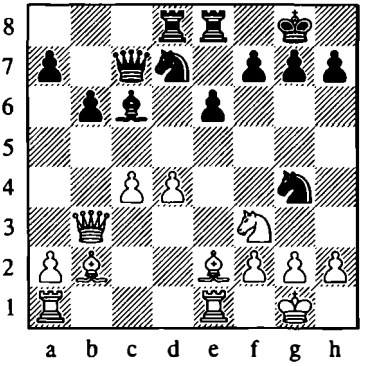
A typical manoeuvre. White wants to play ♗c4-e2 to push c3-c4. By playing ♗c4-b5 first, White causes Black's bishop to become misplaced on c6, where it will be vulnerable. Sooner or later Black will have to waste a tempo with ...♗c6-b7.

14...♘bd7 15.c4 ♕c7 16.♖fe1 ♖ad8

The break 16...e5?! hoping to weaken the hanging pawns, does not work well because White is ready to push d4-d5; his pieces are very active and the c4-pawn is a difficult target to attack. 17.d5 ♗b7 18.h3 ♘c5 19.♕e3 White has a pleasant position, and the game could continue with: 19...♘fe4 (or 19...♘fd7 20.♖ad1 ♖ac8 21.♘h4 g6 22.♗g4!± with strong pressure. Of course 22...f5? fails due to 23.♗xf5! gxf5 24.♘xf5 with a deadly attack.) 20.♘d2 ♘xd2 21.♕xd2 ♕d6 22.♗d1 ♖ac8 23.♖e3 ♖e7 24.♗c2 f6 25.♖ae1± White can continue to progress with h4-h5 and ♖g3.

17.♗b2 ♘f8?!

There is no reason to give away the centre so easily. Better was 17...♘g4.



Provoking White to weaken his long diagonal with g2-g3.

a) White is not ready for the break 18.d5?! due to: 18...♗b7 19.h3 ♘gf6 20.dxe6 ♖xe6=

b) 18.g3 ♘gf6 19.♕e3±

c) 18.h3 ♗xf3 19.♗xf3 ♕h2† 20.♔f1 ♘gf6 when chances are approximately balanced. For

example: 21.♖ad1 ♕h1† 22.♔e2 ♕h2 23.♕e3?! (23.♔f1=) 23...♕c7! 24.♖c1 e5!∓ And Black gains the initiative.

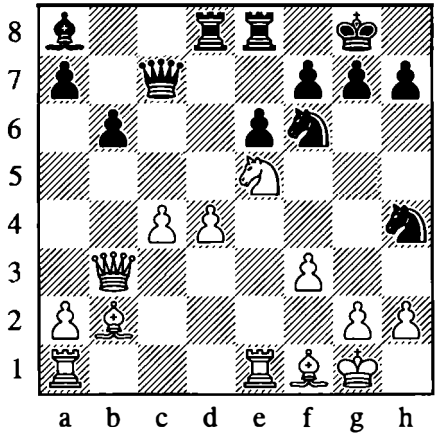
18.♘e5 ♗a8 19.♗f1 ♘g6 20.f3

Preventing ...♘xe5 followed by ...♘e4 or ...♘g4.

Another option is 20.a4!? ♘xe5 21.♖xe5 (21.dxe5? ♘e4!∓ controlling key central squares such as c5) 21...♘g4 22.♖h5 ♘f6 23.♖h4± with interesting attacking chances on the kingside.

20...♘h4

If 20...♘xe5 21.♖xe5 h6 22.a4± White is better due to his space, the pair of bishops and Black's lack of active plans.



21.♗d3?!

It was more important to activate the rook with the accurate 21.♖ad1! preparing a d4-d5 break against Black's potential ...♘h5; after 21...h6 (or 21...♘d7 22.♘g4± with attacking chances on the kingside; 21...♘h5?! is met by 22.d5!±) 22.♕e3± with a good and flexible position.

21...♘d7

Instead 21...♘h5! would allow Black to gain counterplay on the kingside, for example 22.♖ad1? is met by 22...f6! and now Black wins material after: 23.♘g4 ♘f4 24.♗f1 ♘h3†! 25.♔h1 h5! 26.♘e3 ♘f2† 27.♔g1 ♘xd1–+

Or if 22.♗f1 f6 23.♘g4 ♘f4.

Therefore it is necessary to give up the pair of bishops with: 22.♗e4 ♘f4 23.♗xa8 ♖xa8 24.g3 ♘h3† 25.♔f1 f6!?∞

22.♘xd7 ♖xd7?!

This move is a mistake as Black is no longer able to prevent the d4-d5 break. More stubborn was 22...♕xd7 23.♕c2 h6 24.♕f2 ♘f5 25.♗xf5 exf5 26.d5 f6 27.♕d4± though White enjoys a central passed pawn.

23.♕c2 ♔h8

The optimistic 23...♗xf3?! fails due to 24.♕f2 (or 24.♗xh7†!) 24...♘xg2 25.♕xf3 ♘xe1 26.♖xe1± when two bishops are far stronger than a rook and two pawns in this open game.

Safer was 23...♘g6 24.d5 ♖ed8 25.♕c3 f6! (but not 25...e5? due to 26.♗f5 [or 26.♗xg6!?± winning a pawn] 26...♖e7 27.a4 preventing ...b6-b5, and now 27...♘h4 28.♗e4 ♖ee8 29.♖ac1± gives White a dominating position) 26.♗xg6 hxg6 27.♖xe6 b5 28.cxb5 ♗xd5 29.♕xc7 ♖xc7 30.♖e2± Black has drawing chances due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

24.♕f2

An interesting option was 24.d5! immediately developing an attack; but not 24.♗xh7? due to 24...f5! and the bishop is lost.

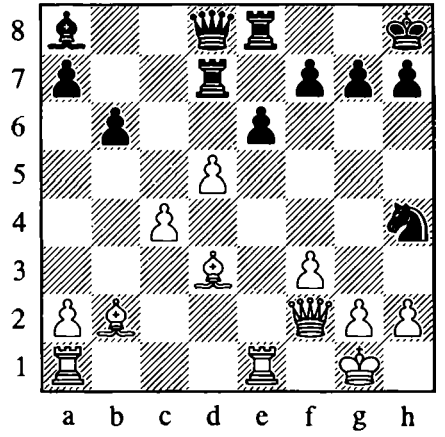
24...♕d8

In the event of 24...♘g6 25.a4± White can prepare and threaten with either break, a4-a5 or d4-d5.

The immediate break with 25.d5!? is interesting too: 25...♖dd8 26.♕e3!? (preventing 26...exd5) and now 26...♕f4 27.♗xg6 ♕xe3† 28.♖xe3 hxg6 29.♖ae1± gives White a favourable endgame, while 26...e5 loses after 27.♗xg6! fxg6 (even worse is 27...hxg6? 28.♗xe5 ♕d7 29.♕h6†!) 28.♖ac1 followed by ♗xe5.

25.d5!

This well-prepared d4-d5 break is simply winning for White. Black cannot defend against such a strong initiative, especially since his pieces lack coordination and White possesses the bishop pair.



25...b5

25...exd5? loses to 26.♕xh4! winning a piece since 26...♖xe1+ 27.♖xe1 ♕xh4? 28.♖e8# is the end.

26.♗c2 ♖g8

More stubborn was 26...bxc4 though after 27.♗a4 ♘f5 (or even worse is 27...♗xd5? 28.♗xd7 ♕xd7 29.♕xh4+–) 28.♗xd7 ♕xd7 29.dxe6 fxe6 30.♗e5 Black is technically lost.

27.dxe6 fxe6

27...♖d2 28.♖e2 ♖xe2 29.♕xe2 fxe6 30.cxb5 and White wins.

28.♖ad1!+–

A simple yet beautiful move which illustrates White's overwhelming initiative once d4-d5 is achieved. Black has no hope of dealing with the multiple threats, the most direct being ♖xd7 followed by ♕xh4.

The imprecise 28.♖xe6? is met by 28...♖d2! 29.♖e2 ♖xe2 30.♕xe2 ♕g5 (threatening ...♗xf3) 31.♖f1 bxc4± when Black is holding the game for longer.

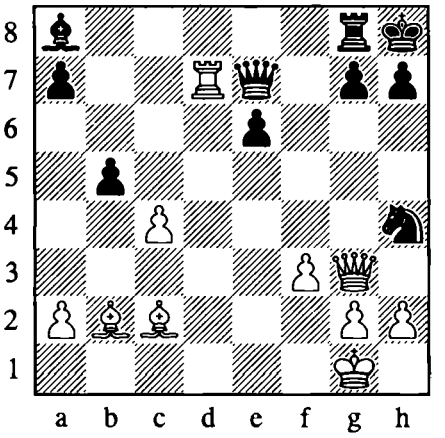
28...♖xd1 29.♖xd1 ♕g5 30.♕g3!

Nice move! It forces Black to choose between a lost endgame and allowing a mating attack.

30...♕e7

Or 30...♕xg3 31.hxg3 ♘g6 32.cxb5 winning due to the bishop pair, the initiative and the extra pawn.

31.♖d7!



Black resigned, in view of 31...♕xd7 32.♕xh4 and there is no satisfactory way to prevent ♕xh7#.

1–0

Final remarks

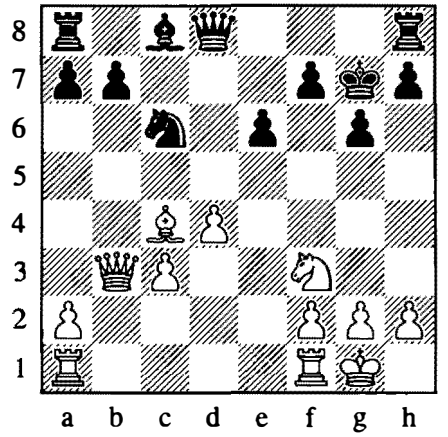
1. It was not possible for Black just to break the hanging pawns with 14...e5. White's good piece placement rendered this move ineffective.
2. White's pair of bishops played a central role in many positions. They are very helpful in an open position such as with hanging pawns. Black seemingly underestimated the decisive d4-d5 break. It was necessary to prevent it, though passive defence would have been unpleasant as well.

Levon Aronian – Hrvoje Stevic

Porto Carras 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates how the d4-d5 break can yield a powerful passed pawn on the d-file.

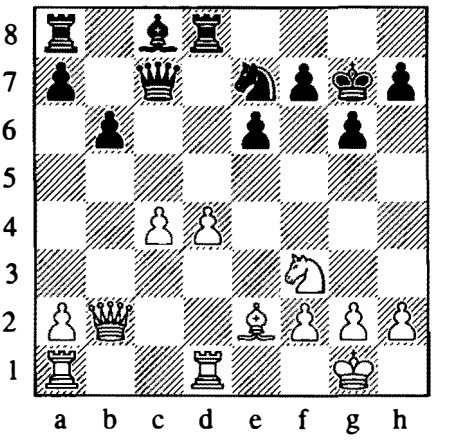
1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 g6 4.e3 ♘f6 5.d4 cxd4 6.exd4 d5 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♕b3 ♘xc3 9.♗c4 e6 10.bxc3 ♗g7 11.♗a3 ♗f8 12.♗xf8 ♔xf8 13.0-0 ♔g7



The opening stage is over, and it is time to evaluate the position. We have reached a hanging pawns position where both sides have some accomplishments. In Black's favour, two pairs of minor pieces have been traded, reducing the chance of a checkmating attack. In White's favour, the dark squares around Black's king are somewhat weakened, especially since there is no dark-squared bishop to cover them. White has a small opening plus.

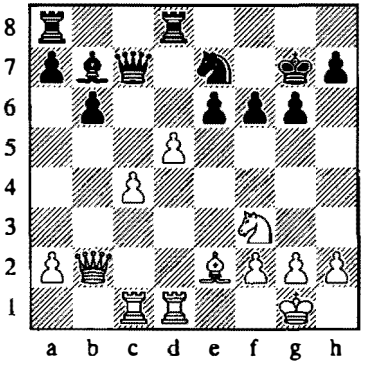
14.♕b5 ♕c7 15.♗e2 ♖d8 16.♖fd1 b6 17.c4 ♘e7 18.♕b2

White has set up his pieces in order to create pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal, which is Black's main weakness. Precision is required to avoid problems.



18...♔g8?!

Better was 18...f6 weakening the kingside, but it is necessary to block the a1-h8 diagonal: 19.♖ac1 ♗b7 20.d5!



20...exd5 (20...e5?! 21.g4! threatens g4-g5 and after 21...h6 22.h4 g5 23.h5± Black's king is more exposed than White's) 21.♘d4 ♕d7 22.h3!? White has a preferable position and threatens ♗g4.

If 18...♖b8 then: 19.d5†! f6 (but not 19...♔g8? due to 20.d6! ♖xd6 21.♖xd6 ♕xd6 22.♖d1 ♕c7 23.♕f6! where White is winning, say after 23...♘c6 24.♘e5 ♕xe5 25.♖d8† ♘xd8 26.♕xe5) 20.♖ac1± The d5-pawn is annoying.

19.♘e5!±

Threatening ♘g4 followed by d4-d5 with serious threats against Black's king.

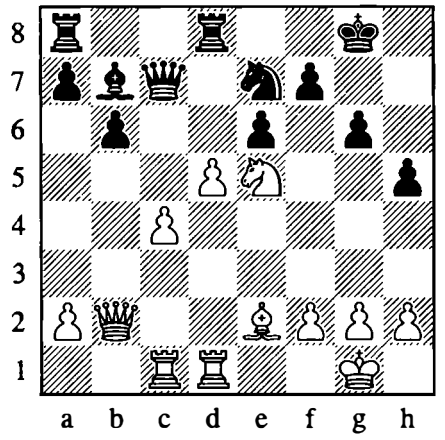
19...h5?!

The try 19...♗b7? does not help due to: 20.d5! h5 (or 20...exd5 21.♘g4 d4 22.♖xd4 ♖xd4 23.♕xd4 ♘f5 24.♕c3± with the unpleasant threat ♘g4-f6) 21.dxe6 fxe6 22.♗d3±

The best defence was 19...f6 20.♘g4 ♔g7 21.♗f3 ♖b8 22.♘e3± with a small edge due to Black's weakened kingside, and the potential d4-d5 break.

20.♖ac1 ♗b7 21.d5!

This break creates serious dangers in Black's camp.



21...exd5?

Allowing the creation of a passed pawn is a clear sign that something has gone wrong.

21...♕d6? hoping for 22.dxe6 ♕xe6, does not help due to 22.c5! bxc5 23.♘c4 ♕b8 (or 23...♕a6 24.dxe6 ♗d5 25.exf7† ♗xf7 26.♘d6+–) 24.dxe6 ♖xd1† 25.♖xd1 ♗d5 26.exf7† ♗xf7 27.♕f6 with multiple winning threats.

The best defence is 21...♖d6! 22.♗f3 (22.dxe6? ♖xe6=) 22...♖e8 23.♖e1±, though Black remains under serious pressure.

22.cxd5±

White is nearly winning due to his powerful passed pawn.

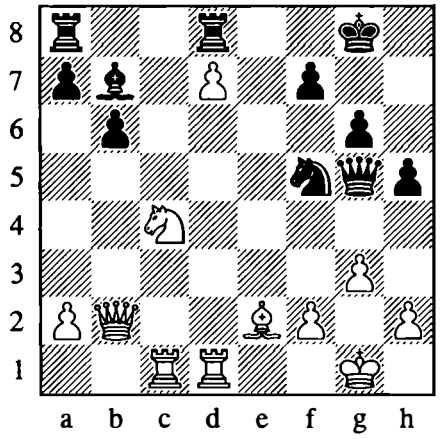
22...♕d6

Or 22...♕b8 23.♘c6 ♗xc6 24.dxc6 ♖xd1† 25.♗xd1 ♕d6 26.♗f3. White's c6-pawn gives him a practically winning position.

23.♘c4 ♕f4 24.d6 ♘f5 25.d7 ♕g5?!

The best practical chance was 25...♗xg2 but White has a strong reply: 26.♕e5! (26.♔xg2?! is more complicated) 26...♕e4! (worse is 26...♕xe5? 27.♘xe5 ♗b7 28.♖c7 ♖ab8 29.♗c4+– or 26...♕g5? 27.f4+–) 27.♕xe4 ♗xe4 28.♘e5 ♘h6 29.♖c7± With a big advantage due to the seventh-rank passed pawn.

26.g3



White is completely winning due to his passed pawn, while Black is unable to create real threats against the king. I do not include the rest of the game as it is incorrectly transcribed in my database.

Final remarks

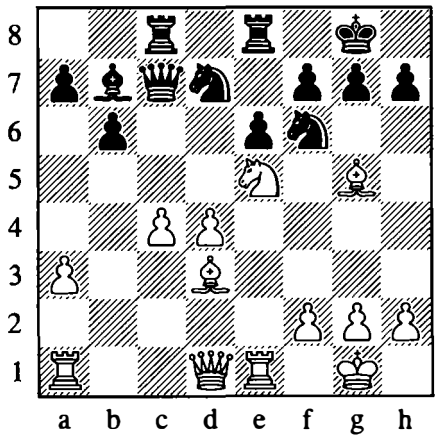
1. Having two minor pieces off the board, it was essential for White to provoke the creation of weaknesses with moves likes 18.♕b2 and 19.♘e5.
2. The creation of a passed d-pawn must be prevented at all costs. In this game, Stevic should have known he was accepting a lost position after 21...exd5, hence he should have played something else, like 21... ♖d6.

Anton Korobov – Bartlomiej Macieja

Warsaw 2010

Learning objective: The hanging pawns structure can be modified after pieces are traded on e5 and White captures with dxe5. This game is an example of how White's attack is conducted in such situations.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♗d3 c5 6.♘f3 d5 7.0–0 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♗xc4 ♘bd7 10.♗d3 b6 11.a3 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♗b7 13.♖e1 ♖e8 14.♗g5 ♕c7 15.c4 ♖ac8 16.♘e5±



After a standard opening, we have reached the position of interest. White's pieces are arranged to create a kingside attack and Black must react carefully.

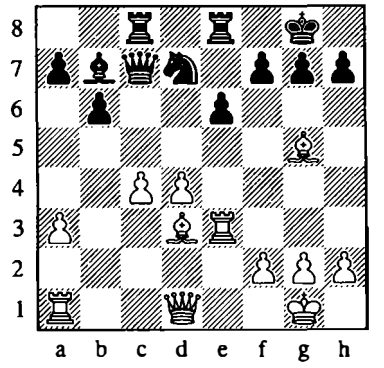
16...♘xe5

After 16...h6 17.♘xd7!? (or 17.♗f4 ♘xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕c6 19.f3±) 17...♘xd7 18.♗h4 White's bishop pair gives him good play, say after 18...♕f4 19.♗g3 ♕f6 (19...♕xd4?? 20.♗h7†+–) 20.a4± followed by a4-a5 to weaken Black's queenside.

17.dxe5?!

This is a typical structure transformation with hanging pawns. The c4-pawn is weakened, while the kingside attack gains strength. A key factor is who gains the initiative after this change.

Better was 17.♖xe5 ♘d7 18.♖e3.



With good attacking prospects, for example 18...h6 19.♗h4 ♘f8 20.♖g3± threatening ♗f6.

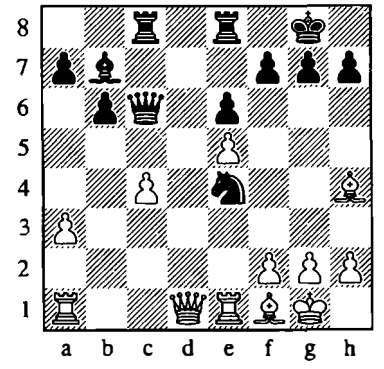
17...♘d7?

This seemingly natural move is a near-decisive mistake, as it allows White to gain the initiative. The intermediate 17...♕c6! was absolutely necessary:

a) 18.f3? is severely punished by 18...♘g4! and after 19.♕e2 (or 19.♗h4 ♕c5† 20.♔h1 ♘xe5–+; 19.fxg4?? ♕xg2#) 19...♕c5† 20.♗e3 ♘xe3 21.♕xe3 ♗a6∓ the c4-pawn and the game are probably lost.

b) 18.exf6?? ♕xg2#

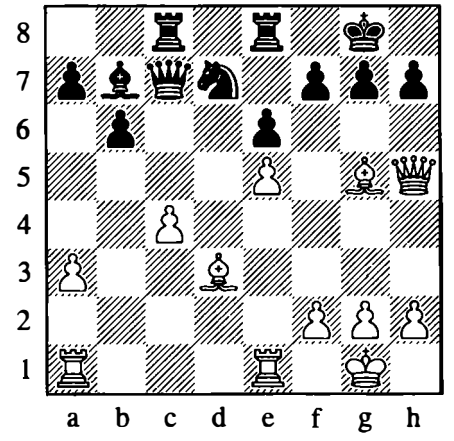
c) 18.♗f1 ♘e4 19.♗h4∞



Chances are balanced, as Black controls key central squares while White retains some attacking chances.

18.♕h5±

Black is already in deep trouble and extreme precision is needed to stay in the game.



18...♘f8?!

Black does not want to weaken the kingside by moving pawns, but this move only aggravates the situation as it gives White time to create further threats.

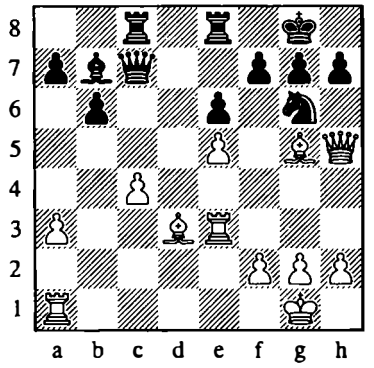
Better was 18...g6 creating some weaknesses but at least blocking the bishop on d3; then after 19.♕h6 threatening to checkmate with ♗f6: 19...♕c5 20.♖e3 ♕f8 21.♕h4± White has a dangerous attack.

19.♖e3

Threatening ♗xh7 and ♖h3.

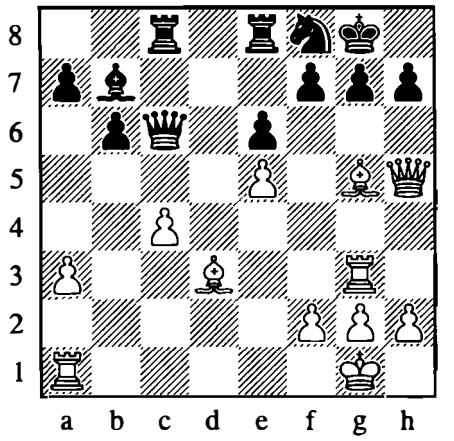
19...♕c6

In the event of 19...♘g6:



Black's position becomes desperate after 20.♖ae1! (threatening 21.♖h3) 20...h6 (or 20...♕c6 21.♗e4 ♕c7 22.♖h3 h6 23.♗xh6 gxh6 24.♗c2!+– with the deadly threats ♕xh6 and ♖g3) 21.♗xh6 gxh6 22.♕xh6 ♖cd8 23.h4!+– Followed by h4-h5 winning.

20.♖g3



20...♖c7?

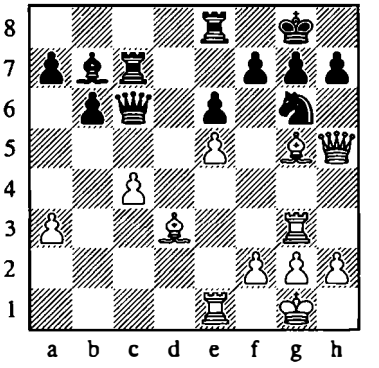
Making things easier. More stubborn was:

20...♘g6 21.♖e1

A prophylactic move defending the e5-pawn against the potential ...♕c5xe5. Now White's threat of h2-h4-h5 is practically winning.

21...♖c7!

Aiming to create counterplay with ...♖d7xd3. 21...♕c5? loses immediately to 22.♖h3! h6 23.♗xh6 gxh6 24.♗xg6.



22.h4 ♖d7 23.♕e2 ♘xe5

Or 23...♘e7 24.♗xe7 ♖dxe7 25.♕g4 g6 26.h5+– followed by hxg6 and ♗xg6.

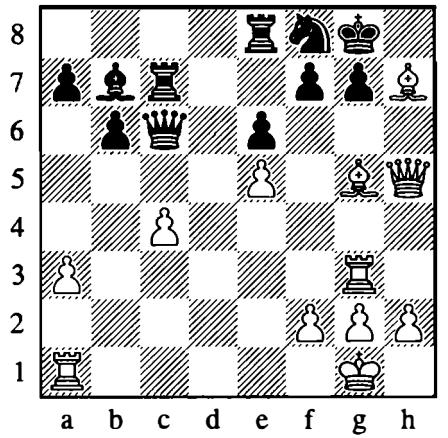
24.♗xh7†

24.♕xe5? ♖xd3! is equal since 25.♖xd3?? allows 25...♕xg2#.

24...♔xh7 25.♕h5† ♔g8 26.♖xe5

White is winning, as 27.♗f6 is coming.

21.♗xh7†!+–



Checkmate cannot be avoided.

21...♘xh7 22.♗f6 ♕xc4

22...g6 23.♕xh7†! ♔xh7 24.♖h3† ♔g8 25.♖h8#

23.♖xg7† ♔f8 24.♕h6 ♖ec8 25.♖g8† 1–0

Final remarks

Black essentially lost this game in one move by playing 17...♘d7. After the capture dxe5, gaining the initiative is necessary to fight for the advantage or even just to stay in the game.

Sandro Mareco – Christian Toth

Osasco 2012

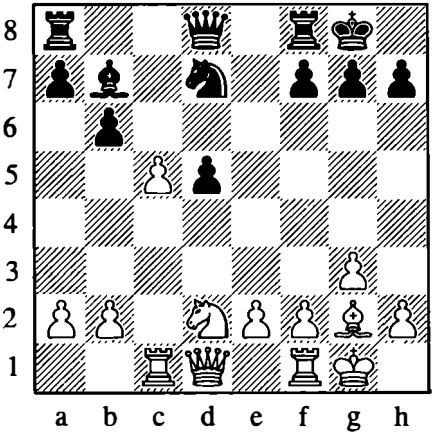
Learning objective: This game illustrates how the hanging pawns may be blocked and subsequently attacked.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♗b4† 4.♗d2 ♗xd2† 5.♘xd2 d5

More common is 5...d6 followed by ...e6-e5, especially since White's knight is on d2.

6.♗g2 0–0 7.♘gf3 b6 8.0–0 ♗b7 9.♖c1 ♘bd7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♘e5 c5 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.dxc5

After a careless opening, Black is already in a difficult position.



13...bxc5?!

Black obtains a terrible version of the typical hanging pawns structure, due to a simple tactical problem.

Better was: 13...♘xc5 14.♘b3 ♘e6 15.♕d2 ♕f6 16.e3± With a pleasant version for White of an isolani position; compare the game Vitiugov – Bologan from the previous chapter.

14.♘b3!

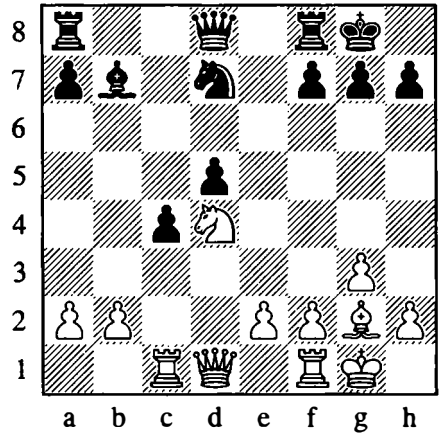
Black cannot maintain his hanging pawns in the ideal c5-d5 position.

14...c4

This advance is undesirable because it loses control of the d4-square. Unfortunately, there was no choice. Of course not 14...♖c8? 15.♗xd5.

15.♘d4±

White's advantage is evident. The chain d5-c4 is weak and does not contribute to the control of the centre.



15...♕a5

An alternative was: 15...♘e5 16.b3 ♕d7 17.♘f3! ♘xf3† 18.♗xf3 cxb3 19.♕xb3± Black has a difficult defence ahead due to the permanently weakened d5-pawn.

Or 15...♘f6 16.b3 ♗a6 17.♘f5 cxb3 18.axb3 ♖e8 19.♖e1± when White has a great version of the isolani.

16.b3!

Breaking the chain d5-c4.

16...♖ab8

The a2-pawn is untouchable with 16...♕xa2? due to 17.♖a1! ♕b2 18.bxc4 (threatening ♖b1) 18...♘c5 (or 18...dxc4? 19.♖b1) 19.cxd5 and the central pawns decide the game.

17.♘f5

White begins to turn his positional dominance into an attack. An immediate threat is ♘e7xd5.

17...♘f6 18.♖c2 ♖fd8

Better was:

18...cxb3 19.axb3 ♕b6

There is no time to pressure the b3-pawn with 19...♗a8 due to 20.♕c1! ♖xb3 21.♖c8! (or 21.♘xg7!?+–) 21...♕b4 22.♕g5 g6 23.♕xf6 gxf5 (23...♖xc8?? 24.♕g7#) 24.♕g5† ♔h8 25.♕xf5+– when the exposure of Black's king makes his position desperate.

20.♕d4!

20.♕a1!?

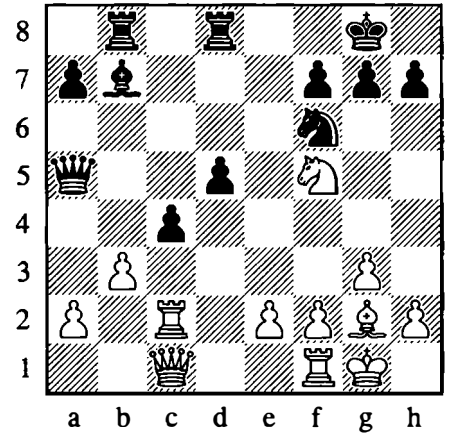
20...♕xd4

Black runs into fatal problems after 20...♕xb3? 21.♖b2 ♕c4 22.♖fb1 as the bishop is lost.

21.♘xd4±

With a pleasant long-term advantage.

19.♕c1!±



White's forces are well coordinated, and now he is ready to embark on a kingside attack. The most immediate threats are ♕g5 and ♘xg7.

19...h6

An alternative was 19...cxb3 20.axb3 ♕b6 21.♕g5 ♘e8 22.♖fc1± when White dominates. Black is one mistake away from losing, for example 22...♕xb3? 23.♘h6† ♔f8 24.♖c7! ♘xc7 25.♖xc7 when the checkmate threat is unstoppable: 25...♕a3 26.♖xf7† ♔e8 27.♕e5† ♕e7 28.♕xe7#

20.♕f4
Threatening ♘xh6†.

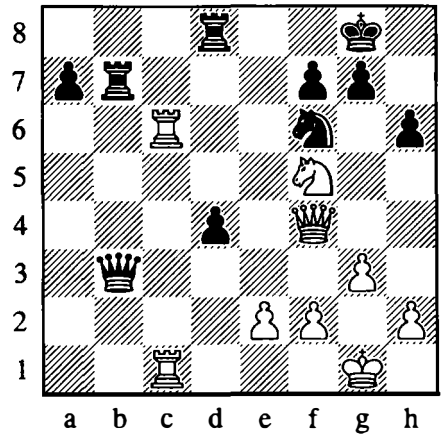
20...cxb3 21.axb3 ♕b6 22.♖fc1 d4?
Making the attack easier.

22...♕xb3 does not help: 23.♘xh6†! gxh6 24.♕xf6+– White has a much better structure and a much safer king.

The best defence was 22...♘e8 23.♖c5 ♕e6 24.♘d4 ♕f6 25.♕xf6 ♘xf6 26.♖b5± though White has great chances to win this endgame.

23.♗xb7 ♖xb7
23...♕xb7 24.♘xh6† gxh6 25.♕xf6 ♕xb3 26.♕xh6 and wins.

24.♖c6 ♕xb3



25.♖xf6! gxf6 26.♕xh6
Black resigned in view of 27.♕g7#.
1–0

Final remarks

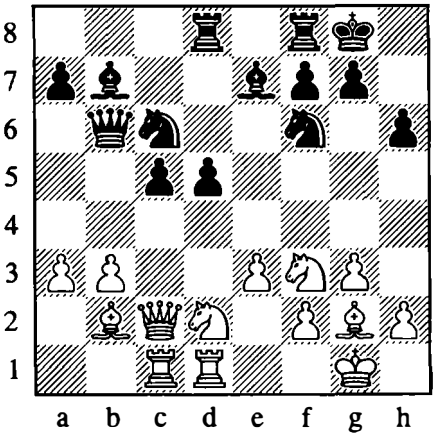
1. Black's biggest mistake was accepting a hanging pawns structure even though his pawns would be blocked from the start.
2. This game is a fine example of how a good strategic concept can be realized tactically.

Axel Bachmann – Max Cornejo

Asuncion 2009

Learning objective: This game illustrates how the break b3-b4 can be successfully carried out against the hanging pawns.

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.♗g2 ♘c6 4.d4 ♘f6 5.0–0 e6 6.b3 ♗e7 7.♗b2 0–0 8.♘bd2 b6 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.c4 ♗b7 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♖c1 ♕a5 13.a3 ♖ad8 14.♕c2 h6 15.♖fd1 ♕b6 16.e3
After a relatively normal opening we arrive at the position we are interested in.



16...♘d7
Preventing ♘h4-f5, and supporting the c5-pawn.

Another option was: 16...♖fe8 17.♘e1 (the idea 17.♘h4 is met by 17...♘g4 18.♘f5 ♗f8 19.h3 ♘ge5=) 17...♘b8 18.♘d3 ♘bd7 (18...♖c8? fails to 19.♗xf6! ♗xf6 20.♘xc5±) 19.b4!± White obtains good chances by breaking up the hanging pawns.

17.♕f5
The d5-pawn is not really threatened by this move.

An alternative was: 17.e4!? d4 (or 17...dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘a5 19.♘fd2±) 18.♘c4 ♕c7 19.b4!? Breaking the c5-d4 chain. 19...cxb4 20.♘xd4

♘xd4 21.♗xd4 bxa3 22.♘xa3 ♕xc2 23.♘xc2 ♗c5 24.♘e3± White is better, though the limited material offers drawing chances to Black.

At this moment the transfer 17.♘e1, aiming for ♘e1-d3 pressuring the c5-pawn, can be met by 17...♘de5 18.♘d3 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 ♖fe8 with a level game.

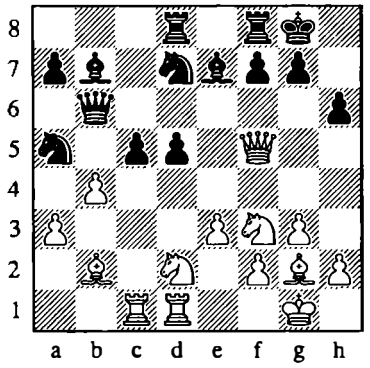
17...♘a5?

Heading in the wrong direction. Placing a knight on a5 only gives more strength to the typical b3-b4 break.

Better was 17...♖fe8! 18.♕g4 (but not 18.♕xd5?? ♘de5 19.♕e4 ♘d3∓ 20.♖b1? ♘d4!–+) 18...♗f6 with level chances.

18.♖b1

A worthy alternative was: 18.b4!?



18...♘c6 (or 18...cxb4 19.axb4 ♗xb4 20.♕g4 with a dangerous kingside initiative) 19.♕g4 g6 (19...♗f6 20.♗xf6 ♘xf6 21.bxc5±) 20.♕f4 ♔h7 21.e4!± White has pushed both typical breaks b3-b4 and e3-e4, with great tactical chances.

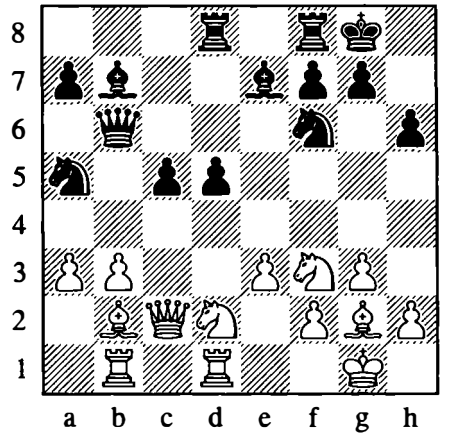
18...♘f6

If 18...♘c6 the break 19.b4!? deserves attention, for example 19...cxb4 20.axb4 ♘xb4 21.♕g4 g6 22.♗d4!?± with more than sufficient compensation.

19.♕c2

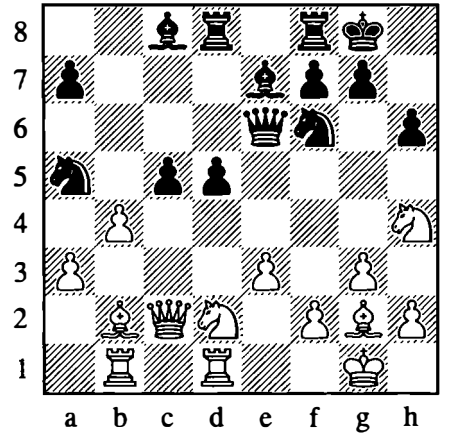
This is somewhat overcautious.

The immediate 19.b4! was again very strong: 19...cxb4 (or 19...♗c8 20.♕c2!± is similar to the main line) 20.axb4 ♘c4 (20...♗xb4? loses to 21.♗xf6! gxf6 22.♕g4† ♔h7 23.♕xb4) 21.♗d4± With good control of the centre.



19...♗c8 20.♘h4 ♕e6 21.b4!

Finally White decides to break with b3-b4. This will turn the hanging pawns c5/d5 into a weak isolated d5-pawn. Also, the d4-square becomes available for a knight.

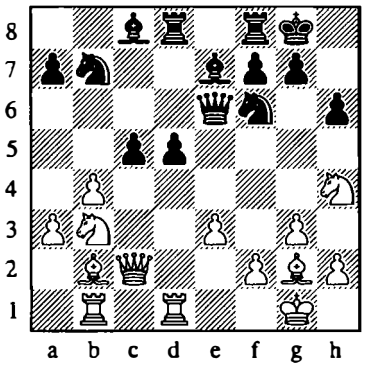


21...♘b7?

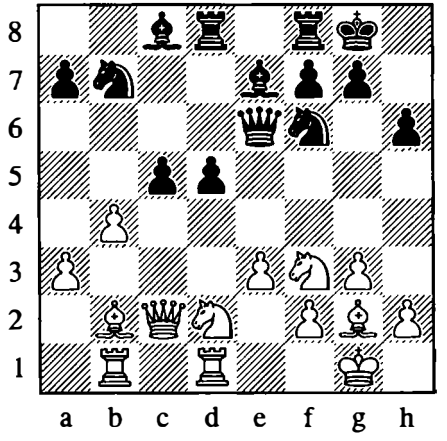
This knight will not come back into the game. The lesser evil was: 21...cxb4 22.axb4 ♘c6 (22...♗xb4?? loses a piece to 23.♗xf6) 23.b5 ♘b4 24.♕b3 a5 25.♖a1 ♕b6 26.♗f1± Black has a difficult position due to the weak a5- and d5-pawns.

22.♘hf3?!

This move maintains the pressure, but misses a stronger continuation. The most precise was: 22.♘b3!



In order to create serious threats on the kingside with ♘d4-f5. After 22...c4 (or 22...cxb4 23.axb4± followed by the strong ♘d4-f5 or ♘d4-c6) 23.♘d4 ♕b6 24.♘df5 Black cannot avoid material loss, for example: 24...♖fe8 25.♗d4 ♕e6 26.♕b2 ♘d6 27.♘xe7† ♕xe7 28.♗xf6 ♕xf6 29.♕xf6 gxf6 30.♖xd5+–

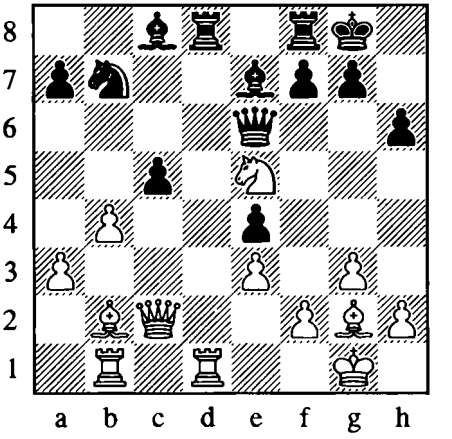


22...♘e4?!

Accepting a *broken* pawn structure which will be severely punished. A better defence was 22...♖fe8 23.bxc5 ♘xc5 24.♘d4± though White has a very favourable version of the isolani.

23.♘xe4 dxe4 24.♘e5±

White has wonderful central control and will soon gain material.



24...cxb4?!

The lesser evil was: 24...♗f6 25.♕xe4 ♖fe8 26.♖xd8 ♘xd8 27.f4±

25.axb4 ♖xd1†

Or 25...♗xb4 26.♘c6! ♖xd1† 27.♖xd1 a5 28.♗xe4 with winning threats, for example 28...♘d6 29.♗d5 ♕g4 30.♖d4.

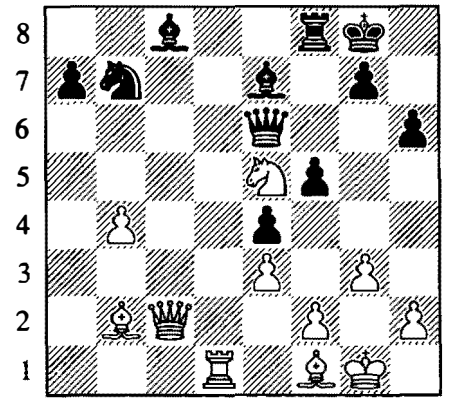
26.♖xd1 f5

Supporting the e4-pawn, but creating more weaknesses.

If 26...♗xb4 27.♘c6 ♗d6 28.♗xe4 and White wins, or 26...♘d6 27.♘c6 (but not 27.♗xe4? ♘xe4 28.♕xe4 f6–+) 27...♗f6 28.♘xa7 when the b-pawn decides the game.

27.♗f1+–

Black's position is hopeless due to his poor piece coordination and the severity of his weaknesses.



27...♔h7 28.♘c6 ♗d6 29.♘xa7 ♗d7 30.♕c3 ♕g6

30...♕e7 31.b5+–

31.♗a6!

Now Black loses a piece by force.

31...f4

31...♖b8 32.♗xb7 ♖xb7 33.♖xd6! ♕xd6? 34.♕xg7#

32.exf4

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's pieces were not very well arranged to start with. On move 17, it would have been better to have a knight on d7 rather than c6, and a bishop on e6 rather than b7.
2. White had multiple opportunities to break up the centre with b3-b4, all of which worked well due to his well-coordinated forces.
3. After the b3-b4 break the essence of the advantage is based on White's pieces using the d4-square as a pivot toward the creation of threats.

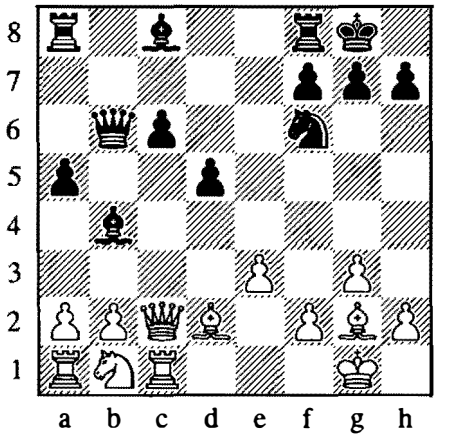
Bartlomiej Macieja – Holden Hernandez

Mexico City 2012

Learning objectives:

1. Black's imprecise opening play allows the hanging pawns to be blocked ideally.
2. We then learn how White may use this fact to disrupt the centre with the standard e3-e4 break, gaining a big advantage.

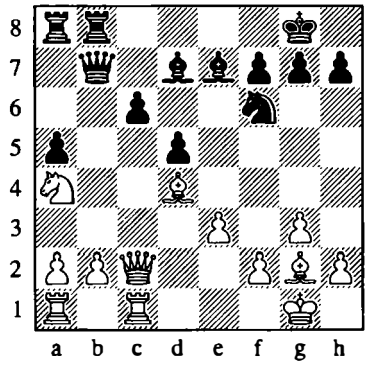
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♗b4† 4.♗d2 a5 5.g3 d5 6.♕c2 c5 7.cxd5 cxd4 8.♗g2 0–0 9.♘xd4 ♕b6 10.e3 exd5 11.0–0 ♘c6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♖c1



I was surprised to find eight games at the GM-level with this position. Black experiences serious difficulties due to his inability to achieve the ...c6-c5 advance in time.

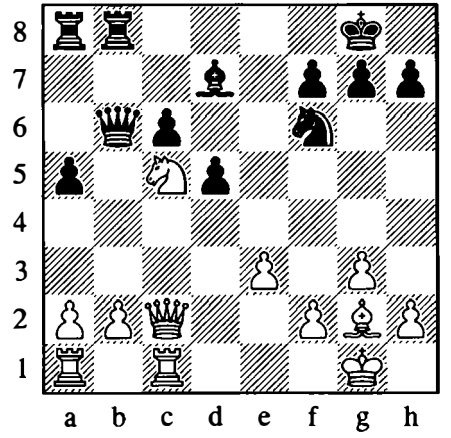
13...♗xd2?!

Accelerating White's plans. The first objective will be to control c5 with ♘b3-c5. More accurate is 13...♗d7 but it does not quite solve Black's problems after: 14.♗c3 ♗e7 (or 14...♗xc3 15.♘xc3 ♖fb8 16.♘a4 ♕a7 17.b3± and White has a lasting advantage due to the blockade on c5) 15.♗d4 ♕b7 16.♘c3 ♖fb8 (16...c5? 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♘xd5+–) 17.♘a4±



This is a position to remember. The blockade ♗d4, ♘c5 turns the c6/d5 pawns into serious weaknesses. Black has no chance to carry out any of the typical plans in a hanging pawns position.

14.♘xd2 ♗d7 15.♘b3 ♖fb8 16.♘c5



16...♗e8

The capture 16...♕xb2 does not solve the problems after 17.♘xd7 ♘xd7 (17...♕xc2?? 18.♘xf6†+–) 18.♕xc6 ♘f6 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♕xd5± when White has good chances of winning this endgame.

17.b3 ♕a7

White has blocked the central pawns and his pieces dominate the board. Hence, it is a good moment for the central break:

18.e4!

Permanently damaging the hanging pawns.

18...h6?!

This allows White to rearrange his pieces. The best defence was 18...♖b5± preventing the transfer ♖c1-e1 followed by ♖a1-c1.

19.♖e1! dxe4 20.♗xe4 ♖b5 21.♖ac1 ♘xe4 22.♖xe4±

With a big positional advantage which soon turns into a kingside attack.

22...f6 23.♕c3 ♗f7 24.♕e3 ♕b8 25.♖e7 ♕f8?!

Better was 25...♕d8, though White has several attractive options such as 26.♖xf7!? ♔xf7 27.♕e6† ♔g6 28.♕e4† ♔f7 29.♕xc6 ♖b6 30.♘e6 ♖xc6 31.♘xd8† ♖xd8 32.♖xc6± with excellent winning chances. Now White could decide the game immediately with:

26.a4!

Instead, White played 26.♖e1? ♖bb8 27.♘d7 ♕xe7! 28.♕xe7 ♖e8 29.♕xe8† ♗xe8 30.♘c5± and eventually won the endgame.

26...♖b4

26...♖bb8 also loses to 27.♘d7.

27.♘d7 ♕d8 28.♖d1!

Threatening ♘xf6† followed by ♖xd8. The key to 26.a4! is that now Black does not have 28...♖d5 available.

28...♗d5

28...♕c8 loses to 29.♘b6 ♖xb6 30.♕xb6.

29.♖xd5! cxd5 30.♘xf6†! ♔h8

30...♔f8 31.♕e6 ♕xe7 (31...gxf6 32.♕f7#) 32.♕g8#

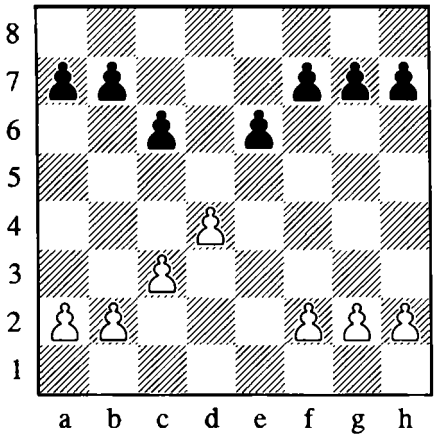
31.♕xh6† gxh6 32.♖h7#

Final remarks

1. Black's opening needs improvement. The hanging pawns will always be inferior if they can readily be blocked as in this game.
2. The break e3-e4 not only forced Black to accept a weak and isolated c6-pawn, but also opened lines for White's attack.

Chapter 3

Caro-Kann Formation



The Caro-Kann formation often appears in the Caro-Kann Defence, the Scandinavian, and the Queen's Gambit Declined (though with the white pawn already on c4) after White plays e3-e4 and Black captures with ...d5xe4. This pawn trade has two major consequences:

(1) White gains better control of the centre.
(2) White has more space by having the d-pawn on the fourth rank.

This structure gives better chances to White in most cases, as Black's pieces are constrained. For this reason, Black's main task is to dispute White's central control by modifying the structure. Now let's discuss specific plans.

White's plans

The control of the centre opens up multiple opportunities for White everywhere on the board, such as:

1. Creating a direct kingside attack. This is often accompanied by placing a knight on the e5 outpost, or targeting the weak h7-pawn with the queen and a bishop from d3.
2. Gaining space with c3-c4, h2-h4 and harmoniously placing pieces to control the centre.
3. Playing c4-c5 to restrict Black's release break ...c6-c5, and to gain control of the d6-square. If White manages to keep Black's counterplay under control, the game will be slow paced and White could even be able to combine some of these plans while Black suffers through passive defence.

Black's plans

The main objective is to dispute White's centre and transform the structure. This can be achieved by:

1. Breaking in the centre with ...c6-c5 which usually produces a black 4–2 (kingside/queenside) versus a white 3–3 pawn structure with roughly level chances.
2. Breaking up the centre with ...e6-e5 in order to obtain a symmetrical position after White captures with dxe5. This plan is rather unlikely to succeed as many of White's pieces control e5 from their natural squares (d4-pawn, knight on f3, rook on e1, queen on e2).
3. Putting pressure on the d4-pawn once c3-c4 has been played.
4. Challenging White's control of the d5-square by playing ...b7-b5 once White has played c2-c4.

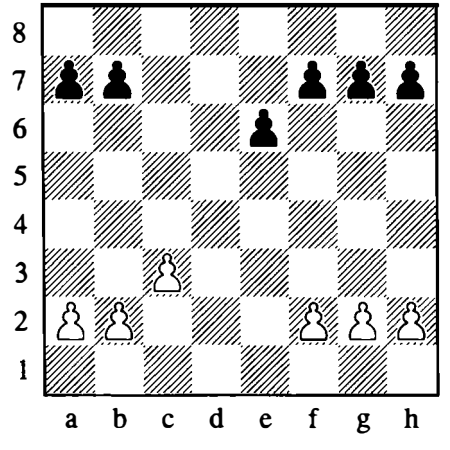
As the reader may notice, all of White's plans aim for an advantage, while Black's Plans 1 and 2 are essentially aimed at equalizing. Black's Plan 3 rarely works, as White is able to defend the d4-pawn in most positions. This is why White's position is somewhat superior. It should be noted that Black's Plan 1 is the most likely to be successfully achieved.

Outposts

Some would say Black can place a knight on his d5 outpost to compensate for White placing a knight on e5; this is certainly not the case. It is unlikely that Black's knight on d5 will create serious threats to White's position. Additionally, White can always push c3-c4 to get rid of this knight if it is absolutely necessary. In contrast, White's knight on e5 is very strong, as it creates threats against Black's king. Black cannot easily expel this knight since ...f7-f6 seriously weakens the kingside.

The first three games in this chapter illustrate how White may successfully carry out his Plans 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Then follow two games which are examples of how Black may successfully carry out the ...c6-c5 break. Finally, the sixth game in the chapter illustrates Black's plan to play ...b7-b5, though White wins the game after the c6-pawn becomes a weakness.

The 3–3 vs. 4–2 Structure



As described in the introduction, Black's main plan in the Caro-Kann structure is to achieve the ...c6-c5 break. If this is achieved, White would probably capture with dxc5 after which we would obtain the pawn structure shown in this diagram. Throughout this chapter and subsequent chapters, I will refer to this structure as the 3–3 vs. 4–2 structure simply because of the distribution of pawns. This is a relatively simple pawn structure which often offers balanced chances.

Vladimir Akopian – Alexandr Shimanov

Plovdiv 2012

Learning objective: This game is an example of White's chances of a mating attack.

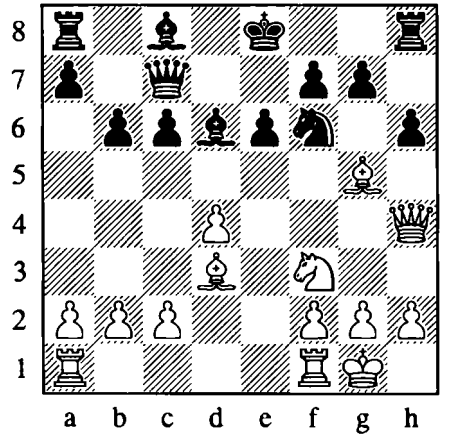
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♘g5 ♘gf6 6.♗d3 e6 7.♘1f3 ♗d6 8.♕e2 h6 9.♘e4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♕c7 11.0–0 ♘f6?!

An imprecision. Theory suggests 11...b6 12.♕g4 ♔f8 13.b3 ♗b7 14.♗b2 ♘f6 15.♕h3 ♘d5 with an approximately balanced game.

12.♕h4 b6 13.♗g5!?±

White has a better position due to his lead in development, extra space and attacking prospects against Black's uncastled king.

The inaccurate 13.♖e1 ♗b7 14.♘e5 (14.♗g5!?) is met by 14...0–0–0!= when Black's king is safe on the queenside.



13...♗e7

13...♘d5 is no better, due to 14.c4 ♘b4 15.♗b1± when Black's knight on b4 is doing nothing.

14.♗f4

After 14.♖ad1? Black can trade off bishops with 14...♘d5 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♕g3 0–0 17.c4 ♘f6 18.♖fe1± but White maintains a preferable position due to his space advantage.

14...♕d8?

Inaccurate; Black does not quite realize how dangerous White's threats really are.

14...♘d5! is necessary: 15.♗xc7 ♗xh4 But here White has several options to maintain a small advantage, for example: 16.♗e5!? (a worthy alternative is 16.♗xb6 ♗xf2† 17.♖xf2 axb6 18.♘e5 f6! 19.♘g6±) 16...♗f6 17.♖fd1 Black cannot easily release his position, for example 17...♗b7 hoping for ...c6-c5 next move: 18.c4 ♘e7 19.c5!?± Keeping Black's light-squared bishop out of the game for a while.

15.♘e5!±

A few precise moves have been enough for White to dominate the board; Black is already on the verge of losing.

15...♗b7

It is too late for simplification by 15...♘d5? 16.♕g4 ♘xf4 17.♕xf4 0–0 18.♘xc6 as Black simply loses a pawn.

A better defence is 15...♘d7 16.♕g3 ♘xe5 (16...0–0?? 17.♗xh6+–) 17.dxe5 (or 17.♗xe5 ♗f6 18.♖ae1± but Black can hold on for longer) 17...♔f8 18.♖ad1± and White is much better, but he does not have an obvious route to victory.

16.♖ad1

The black monarch is trapped in the centre, thus placing rooks on the d- and e-files is simply logical.

16...♗d6?!

This is probably Black's last inaccuracy.

Black cannot escape the centre with 16...0–0? since 17.♗xh6! just wins, for example: 17...gxh6 18.♕xh6 (the threat is ♘g4 followed by ♘xf6 and mate on h7) 18...♖e8 19.♗g6! fxg6 (or 19...♖f8 20.♖d3 and mate is unstoppable) 20.♕xg6† ♔h8 21.♘f7#

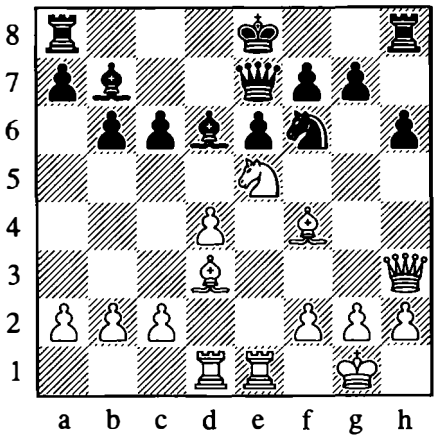
It is not too late for 16...♘d7 17.♕g3 ♘xe5 18.dxe5 g5!? when Black gets to survive longer, though White is indisputably better.

17.♖fe1 ♕e7

Again 17...0–0? loses to 18.♗xh6! gxh6 19.♕xh6 followed by ♖e3-g3.

An alternative is 17...♗xe5 18.♗xe5 0–0 though after 19.♕h3! the threat of ♖e3-g3 wins.

18.♕h3!



Creating the nasty threat of 19.♘g6! fxg6 20.♖xe6.

18...♘d5 19.♗g3 0–0

Trying to escape to the queenside with 19...0–0–0 fails to: 20.♘g6! fxg6 (20...♕c7 21.♘xh8+–) 21.♖xe6 ♕d7 22.♗xd6+–

19...♘f6 20.♘g6! fxg6 21.♖xe6 and wins.

20.c4

Black's position is desperate.

20...♘f6

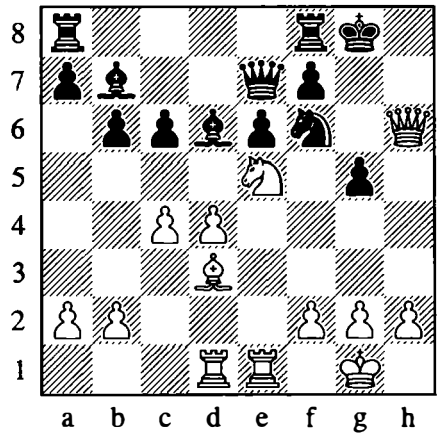
20...♗xe5 doesn't help as after 21.♗xe5 ♘f6 22.♖e3 the entrance of the rook into the attack decides the game: 22...♖fd8 23.♖f3 ♘d7 24.♗f4 (threatening ♗xh6) 24...f5 25.♖g3 ♔h7 26.♖e1! Followed by ♗xf5 or ♖xe6 winning.

Neither does 20...♘b4 achieve anything: 21.♗b1 and Black is defenceless, for example 21...♖fe8 22.a3 ♘a6 23.c5 ♗c7 24.♗h4 f6 25.♗g6 with a crushing attack.

21.♗h4!+–

Threatening ♘g4 followed by ♗xf6 winning.

21...g5 22.♗xg5 hxg5 23.♕h6



Black resigns since mate cannot be avoided without great material loss. For example: 23...♖fd8 24.♘g4! ♘xg4 25.♕h7† ♔f8 26.♕h8# **1–0**

Final remarks

1. White's attack became irresistible after Black fell behind in development. The sacrifice ♗xh6 is a recurring idea in this structure.
2. Black's best attempt for a defence was playing ...♘d7xe5 hoping White would play dxe5. In many variations such a change of structure would block many lines of attack allowing Black to survive longer.

Bartlomiej Macieja – Jesus Nogueiras Santiago

Puebla 2013

Learning objective: This game is an example of how White may slowly improve his position as long as Black cannot achieve the breaks ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5.

1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 dxe5 5.♘xe5 c6 6.h3!?

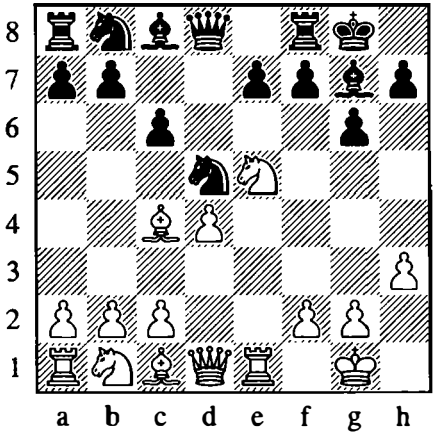
This move is rather uncommon, but the position is quite flexible and there are many options to maintain an opening edge. The virtue of this move is to prevent Black from trading his light-squared bishop with ...♗g4xf3 when the knight retreats from e5.

More common is 6.♗e2 ♘d7 7.♘f3± with a comfortable position.

6...g6 7.♗c4 ♗g7 8.0–0 0–0

8...♗xe5 9.dxe5 0–0 10.♗h6 ♖e8 11.♕d2±

9.♖e1



9...♗e6

Strange-looking, but Black does not really have better squares for this bishop.

Normal would be 9...♘d7 10.♘f3 e6 11.♗f1 when White stands better as Black cannot

easily release his position with either ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5, for example: 11...c5?! 12.c4 ♘b4 13.♗g5 ♕b6 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♘c3± Black is struggling to finish developing his pieces; play might continue: 15...♗d7?! 16.♗e7 ♖fe8? 17.♗xc5+–

The alternative 9...♗f5 faces tactical problems after 10.♘c3! ♘xc3 11.bxc3 when Black is under strong pressure since 11...♘d7? fails to 12.♘xf7! ♖xf7 13.g4 winning a piece.

10.♗f1 ♘d7 11.♘f3

To retain his space advantage White must avoid trading pieces if possible.

Erroneous would be 11.♘xd7?! ♕xd7 12.c3 ♕c7 when Black easily equalizes after 13.♘d2 ♖ad8 14.♘f3 c5.

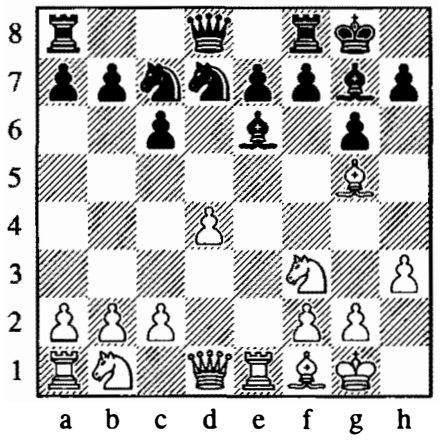
11...♘c7

Black probably would like to proceed with ...♗d5 followed by ...♗xf3 alleviating his space problem.

An interesting alternative is 11...b5!? preventing White from gaining more space with c2-c4: 12.c3 ♕c7 13.♘bd2 h6 White's position is only a little better.

12.♗g5±

White has good control of the position.



12...♖e8 13.♘bd2

Preventing ...♗d5xf3 with 13.c4 allows Black some counterplay with 13...b5! fighting for control of the d5-square.

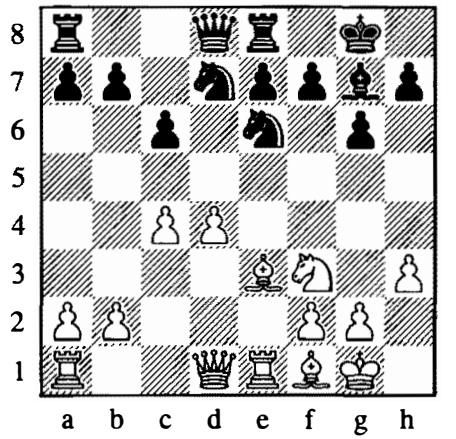
13...♗d5 14.c4 ♗xf3 15.♘xf3

Black finally manages to trade off one piece, but all his remaining pieces are awkwardly placed.

15...♘e6

The alternative 15...h6 16.♗e3 e5! would alleviate some of Black's space problems; however 15...h6 can be met by 16.♗h4! preventing ...e7-e5, and maintaining the pressure.

16.♗e3



Macieja enjoys a lasting advantage due to his space and the bishop pair. He will proceed to consolidate in the centre, in order to embark on kingside operations.

16...♘c7?!

Placing the knights in this way is rather unnatural, and only makes White's task simpler.

A healthier move is 16...♕c7 17.♕c2 ♘f6 18.♖ad1 ♖ad8 though Black's position is definitely inferior.

17.♕b3 ♕c8 18.♖ad1±

White simply controls the game, and he may soon start a kingside initiative with h3-h4-h5.

18...a5

The break 18...e5?! is refuted by 19.dxe5 ♘xe5 20.♘g5± followed by ♘e4-d6.

19.g3

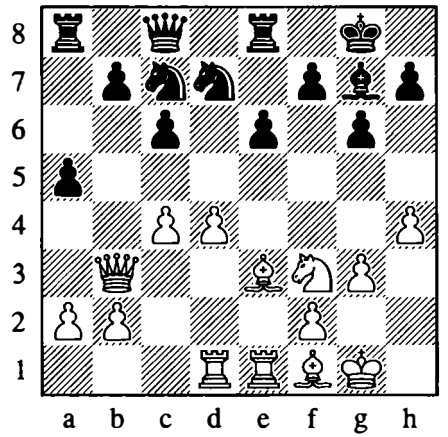
Preparing h3-h4 next move.

It might be too soon for 19.h4 because after 19...e5 20.♘xe5 ♘xe5 21.dxe5 ♗xe5 22.g3± White preserves an advantage due to his bishops, but h3-h4 is not as useful in this position.

19...e6

Probably better is 19...e5 releasing Black's position somewhat. 20.♘xe5 ♘xe5 21.dxe5 ♖xe5 22.♖e2± followed by ♖ed2 with firm control of the d-file.

20.h4!



The typical h4-h5 plan is applied and once again Black must choose between allowing this plan or preventing it with ...h7-h5. In either case White will gain good tactical opportunities against Black's castled position.

20...a4 21.♕c2 h5

It is not too late to try breaking up White's centre with 21...e5, though now White has the extra option: 22.d5!? ♘a6 23.dxc6 bxc6 24.♗h3± Black's position is very difficult, but this is better than being asphyxiated by White's pieces.

Instead if 21...♘f6 22.♗g5 h6 23.♗f4± Black does not have any useful moves, while White can slowly improve his position with ♘e5 and ♗d3 followed by potential sacrifices on g6 or f7.

22.♗f4

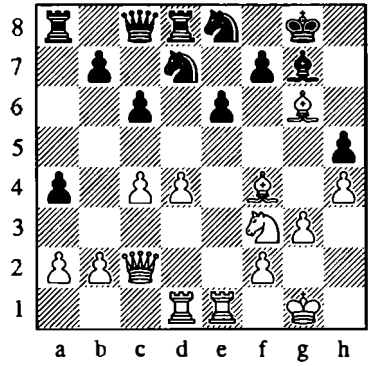
Ruling out the possibility of an ...e6-e5 break, as well as taking control of the d6-square; a possible plan is ♘g5-e4-d6.

22...♖d8 23.♗d3

The threats against Black's kingside begin to appear.

23...♘f8

For example, the careless 23...♘e8 allows a potential (but not necessary) sacrifice: 24.♗xg6!?

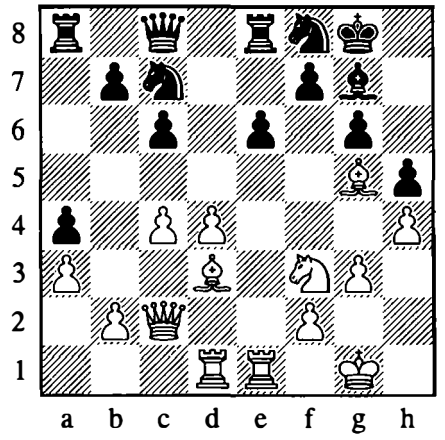


24...fxg6 25.♕xg6 ♘f8 The only move (instead, the natural 25...♘df6? loses to 26.♘g5 ♕d7 27.♖xe6 followed by ♖del and ♖e7). 26.♕xh5 ♘f6 27.♕g5± White has a dangerous attack.

24.♗g5 ♖e8

The rook is awkwardly placed after 24...♖d7 25.♗e4 ♘e8 26.♘e5! since 26...♗xe5 27.dxe5± leaves Black in a precarious position.

25.a3



Fixing the weak a4-pawn. White's position is ideal; he has a free hand to prepare decisive action on the kingside.

25...b5?!

Black decides to search for counterplay by fighting for the d5-square. Unfortunately for him, it is too late and this only makes White's job easier.

If 25...♘d7 White could break through the defence with 26.♘e5 (or 26.♗xg6!? fxg6 27.♕xg6±) 26...♘f8 27.♗f4 ♖d8 28.♗e4 ♘e8 29.c5!?± followed by ♘c4. This plan is analyzed in the next game.

26.♖c1

Simple and effective – the c6-pawn is now a serious weakness.

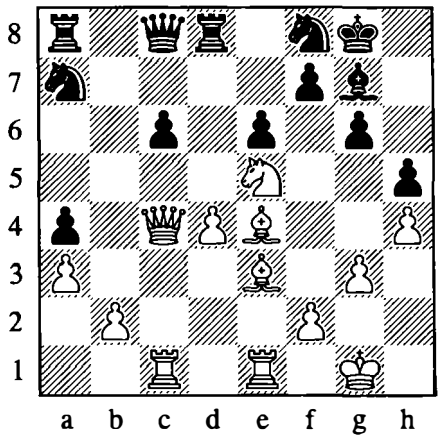
26...bxc4

If 26...♕a6 27.♗e4 ♖ec8 28.♘e5! ♗xe5 29.dxe5± Black's kingside is worse than ever, the threat being ♗f6 followed by ♕d2-h6-g7#.

27.♕xc4 ♘b5 28.♘e5+–

Black's position simply collapses.

28...♘a7 29.♗e3 ♖d8 30.♗e4



Black resigns as he cannot prevent the loss of pawns on c6 and a4.

1–0

Final remarks

1. White's spatial advantage played a major role throughout the game. The reader should notice how Macieja avoided trading pieces when possible, for example with 11.♘f3.
2. Black was constantly forced to calculate White's speculative threats, such as 23.♗d3 followed by a potential 24.♗xg6 sacrifice. It is possible Macieja did not even waste a minute calculating such a sacrifice, though Black was obliged to assess whether the sacrifice worked, or otherwise prevent it *just to be safe*.
3. Black's desperate attempt with ...b7-b5 accelerated the downfall of his position, but the loss was imminent anyway, and White had great flexibility in choosing which winning plan to implement.

Ivan Ivanisevic – Pero Ascic

Zupanja 2007

Learning objective: This game is an example of the advance c4-c5, in order to gain control of the d6-square and to fix the centre, also preventing Black from releasing his position with ...c6-c5.

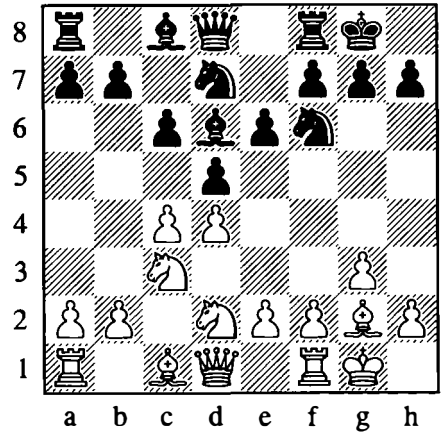
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6

The Catalan main line is 3...♘f6 4.g3 ♗e7 5.♗g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 when Black should have a perfectly playable position.

4.g3 ♘d7 5.♗g2 ♗d6 6.0–0 ♘gf6 7.♘c3 0–0

Black has developed his pieces schematically with little regard to specific move orders. In particular, we should note that Black's bishop is hanging on d6, hence the reply:

8.♘d2!



Simply logical, and creating difficulties for Black. White will play e2-e4 next move and recapture with ♘xe4 gaining a crucial tempo.

8...♖e8

In the event of 8...♗c7 9.e4 dxc4 (or 9...dxe4 10.♘dxe4 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4 since 11...e5? is met by 12.d5!± with a strong passed pawn) 10.e5 ♘d5 11.♘xc4± White is better. This is similar to the fragment of Andreikin – Kramnik which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

9.e4 dxe4 10.♘dxe4 ♘xe4

After 10...♗c7 11.♖e1 h6 12.f4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 ♖b8 14.♗e3 a5 15.♕c2 b6 16.♖ad1± as in the game Papaioannou – Lajthajm, Budva 2009, White dominates the board since neither ...e6-e5 nor ...c6-c5 is possible.

11.♘xe4 ♗e7?!

Giving up the b8-h2 diagonal and admitting 6...♗d6 was imprecise.

A healthier continuation is 11...♗c7 preventing 12.♗f4, though after 12.♗g5 f6 13.♗e3± White enjoys a pleasant spatial advantage.

12.♗f4!

The best move, keeping an eye on the ...e6-e5 break.

Instead, the premature 12.c5?! would allow 12...e5! after which Black solves most of his problems, for example 13.♗e3 exd4 14.♗xd4 ♘f6 15.♗xf6 ♕xd1 16.♖fxd1 ♗xf6 17.♘xf6† gxf6 with an inferior but defensible position.

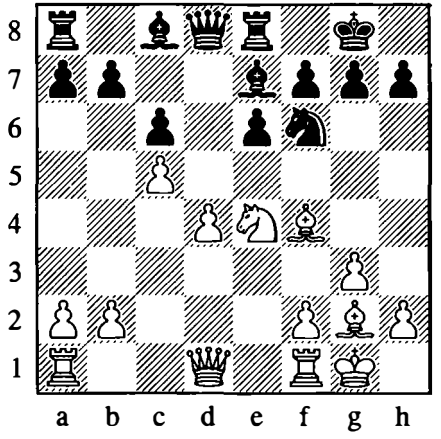
12...♘f6

Black is not well prepared for 12...c5? since after 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♘d6! White wins the pair of bishops and the queenside majority will advance easily, for example: 14...♗xd6 15.♗xd6 ♕b6 16.♕d4 ♘d7 17.c5 ♕a6 18.a4! And White wins after either 18...♘f6 19.b4 or 18...e5 19.♖fe1.

13.c5!±

As a young chess player I was very puzzled by moves like this. My strategy books had taught me that c4-c5 was a colossal positional mistake since the d4-pawn would be permanently vulnerable as a backward pawn, and the d5-square would be easily controlled by Black's knight. This is all true, but in this pawn structure the c4-c5 move has far more benefits than drawbacks. This move fixes the central structure, permanently banning

the ...c6-c5 break and locking in Black's light-squared bishop. In addition, the d6-square becomes accessible to a knight, and clearly White's knight on d6 would be far more powerful than Black's knight on d5. Finally, White secures a stable spatial advantage, and the d4-pawn is easily defended in the current position, though it could become vulnerable if White did not proceed correctly.



13...♘d5

Black is not helped by:

13...♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗f6

Or 14...♕d7 15.♗e5± since 15...f6?! is met by 16.♕h5!.

14...f5 15.♗g2 ♗f6 16.♗e5 ♕e7 17.♕c2±

15.♗e5

White controls the board, for example:

15...g6

Even worse is 15...♗xe5 16.dxe5 f5 (or 16...♗d7 17.♕c2! h6 18.♖ad1+–) 17.♗g2 ♖f8 18.♕c2 ♕c7 19.f4 ♖d8 20.♖ad1± and White is already close to winning.

16.♕c2 ♕e7 17.♖ad1

White has a free hand in this position, hence he can slowly improve, gain space, or create an attack, for example:

17...♗g7 18.♖d3 ♖d8 19.♖fd1 ♗d7 20.♕c3

Threatening ♗xg7 followed by d4-d5.

20...♗f8 21.h4!?±

14.♗d6!

By trading dark-squared bishops White takes possession of the d6-square.

14...b6

This move does not help to create counterplay, but it does turn the c6-pawn into a new target.

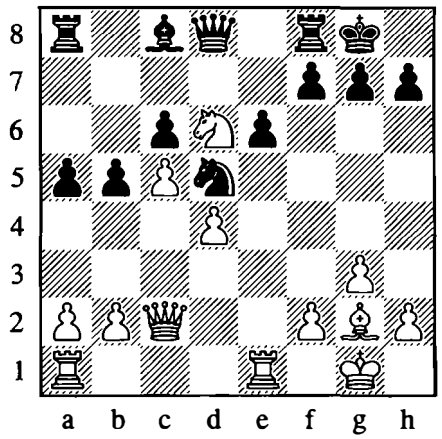
If 14...♗xd6 15.♘xd6 ♖e7 16.♖e1 White is in full control, and possibly the best continuation is: 16...♘f6 17.♕d2 ♖d7 18.♖ad1 ♖xd6 (conserving material by 18...♘e8 leads to 19.♘c4 ♕c7 20.b4 ♘f6 21.a4 ♖d8 22.b5± – a typical plan to create pressure against the c6-pawn; White is close to winning) 19.cxd6 ♕xd6 20.♕a5± Black is unlikely to survive an exchange down.

15.♕a4! b5?!

This move is basically accepting a lost position. The inclusion of the moves 14...b6 and 15...b5 only turned the c6-pawn into a chronic weakness.

Slightly better is 15...♕d7 keeping the tension, though after 16.♖ac1 ♖d8 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7 18.♘d6 only White is able to create threats, for example 18...a5 19.♖fe1 ♖b8 20.♕c2 ♗a6 21.♗h3!± threatening ♘xf7 followed by ♗xe6.

16.♕c2 a5 17.♖fe1 ♗f8 18.♗xf8 ♖xf8 19.♘d6



White's advantage is obvious; we just need to compare knights and bishops. White can trade his bishop for Black's knight anytime, while

Black cannot make much use of his locked-in light-squared bishop.

19...♖b8

19...♘e7? loses to 20.♘xb5!.

20.♗e4 h6

If 20...g6 then White is likely to proceed with 21.♕d2 ♘e7 22.h4! followed by h4-h5-hxg6 with a powerful attack.

21.♕d2 ♗d7

More stubborn is 21...♘e7 though White progresses without difficulty, for example 22.♕f4 ♗d7 23.h4 ♕c7 24.h5 ♘c8 25.♖ac1 ♘e7 26.♕e5 (threatening ♘xf7) 26...f6 27.♕f4 ♘c8 28.♗d3!?± White threatens ♕e4-h7.

22.♗xd5!

Good timing; the battle between White's knight and Black's bishop is easily won.

22...cxd5

Or 22...exd5 23.♖e5 ♕f6 24.f4 b4 25.♖ae1 when the invasion down the e-file decides the game.

23.♖ac1 ♕c7 24.g4!

Announcing a decisive kingside attack.

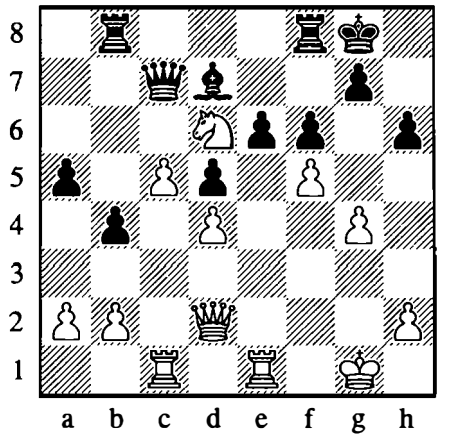
24...f6

Preventing g4-g5.

If instead 24...b4 25.g5 h5 (or 25...hxg5 26.♕xg5 followed by ♔h1, ♖g1 winning) 26.♕f4 ♗c6 27.♖e3 g6 28.♖f3 ♕e7 29.♕e5 then the win is imminent after ♖f6 and one of many tactical shots, such as f2-f4-f5.

25.f4 b4 26.f5!+–

Opening the e-file decisively. The rest is easy.



26...exf5 27.gxf5 ♗e8 28.♖e3 ♖d8 29.♖ce1 ♗c6 30.♕g2 ♖d7

30...♖xd6? 31.♖e7! and wins.

31.♕g6 ♕a7 32.♖e8 ♖xd6 33.♖8e7! 1–0

Final remarks

1. Throughout the entire game, White's d4-pawn was never vulnerable and the d5-square did not do much for Black, hence the c4-c5 move did not really weaken anything.
2. The move c4-c5 prevented essentially all of Black's attempts for counterplay. In particular, Black's light-squared bishop proved useless throughout the game.
3. 11...♗e7 was a serious mistake, as it allowed White to seize control of the crucial d6-square, which was essential in White's victory.
4. Finally, this game serves as another example of White's positional advantage if the breaks ...c6-c5 and ...e6-e5 are impossible. Black's imprecise opening condemned him to this type of inferiority from the very beginning.

Conrad Holt – Ga ta Kamsky

Saint Louis 2013

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's successful ...c6-c5 break followed by an attack against White's king.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.e3 g6 6.h3 ♗g7 7.♗d3 0–0 8.0–0 e6 9.b3 ♖e8 10.♗b2 ♘bd7 11.♕c2 b6 12.♖fd1 ♗b7 13.e4 dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4

The key position has been reached; Black manages to free his position with the nice sequence:

15...f5! 16.♗d3 c5

Black has solved his space problem and now White must play carefully to maintain equality.

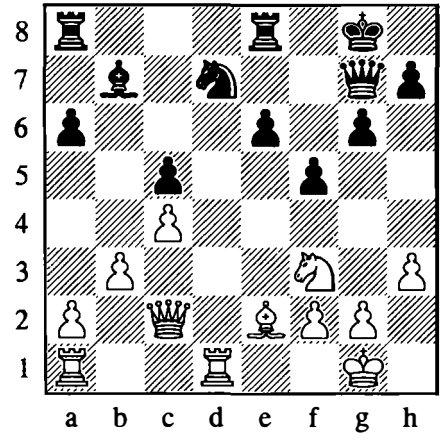
17.♗e2

The tempting 17.d5?! ♗xb2 runs into: 18.♕xb2 ♕f6! (but not 18...exd5?! 19.cxd5 ♗xd5 20.♗xa6 with a complicated game) 19.♕xf6 ♘xf6 The d5-pawn is now pinned! 20.dxe6 ♗xf3 21.gxf3 ♖xe6∓

17...♕e7 18.dxc5 bxc5

The alternative 18...♘xc5 19.♗xg7 ♕xg7 is okay too, but it gives more mobility to White's queenside majority.

19.♗xg7 ♕xg7



We have reached a critical moment in the game. Black's plan is quite clear: he must advance his pawn majority on the kingside and possibly create some threats against the king. White must create counterplay by pushing his majority on the queenside, but this is not easy as after b3-b4 the c4 pawn will be vulnerable. Black's position is not necessarily superior from an objective perspective, but the reader should understand that conducting Black's side will be a much simpler task than White's.

20.♕d2 ♖e7 21.b4

There are no other constructive plans.

21...e5 22.bxc5 ♘xc5 23.♕a5 ♖c8 24.♖ab1

More accurate is 24.♖d8† ♖xd8 25.♕xd8† ♕f8 26.♕a5 (trading queens with 26.♕xf8†?! ♔xf8 leads to an unpleasant endgame due to Black's superior pawn structure, for example 27.♖d1 ♔e8 28.♘d2 ♖d7 29.♘b3 ♖xd1† 30.♗xd1 ♘d3∓ and only Black can play for a win) 26...♖e8 27.♘d2 ♕e7 when chances are approximately level.

24...♖ee8

More accurate is 24...e4! 25.♘d4 (the endgame arising after 25.♖d8† ♖xd8 26.♕xd8† ♕f8 27.♕xf8† ♔xf8∓ is uncomfortable for White) 25...e3!? with good attacking chances for Black.

25.♘d2 e4 26.♘b3 ♘e6

Of course Black does not wish to trade pieces yet, as it is difficult for White to create threats effectively.

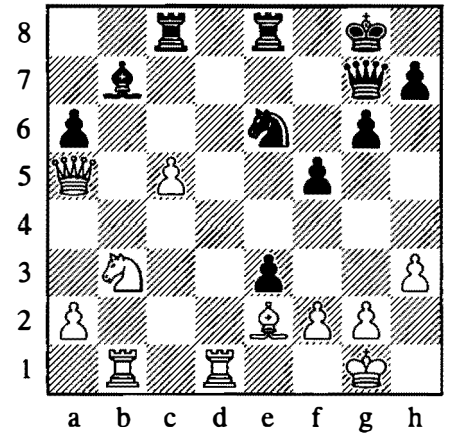
27.c5

It is easy to see that this weak and isolated pawn will not get very far.

Safer is 27.♕d2 ♕e5 though Black has a comfortable game.

27...e3!

Beginning to create threats against White's king.



28.fxe3 ♕e5 29.♕d2 ♖cd8

An option was 29...♖ed8!? 30.♕e1 ♕xe3† 31.♕f2 ♕xf2† 32.♔xf2 with roughly level chances; but of course not 29...♘xc5?? 30.♘xc5 ♕xc5 31.♖xb7 and wins.

30.♕e1 ♗d5!?

Black wants to keep the game sharp. The alternative 30...♖xd1 31.♖xd1 ♘xc5 simplifies too much for Black's ambitions.

31.♗xa6 ♖a8 32.♗b5?

White miscalculates in a difficult position. Necessary was 32.♗f1 ♖xa2 when Black enjoys good compensation for the pawn.

32...♖xa2 33.♖xd5?

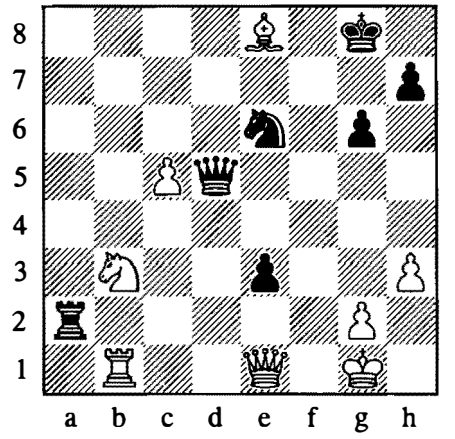
If 33.♘d2 ♖ea8 Black has a very dangerous initiative, while 33.♗xe8?? loses immediately after 33...♖xg2† 34.♔f1 ♕h2 with forced checkmate.

33...♕xd5 34.e4

34.♕f1 ♖e7–+ doesn't help either.

34...fxe4 35.♗xe8 e3!–+

This is probably what White missed when he decided to play 32.♗b5.



36.♗f7†!?

A humorous resource.

Black is winning after 36.♕g3 ♘f4! since 37.♕xf4? ♕xg2 is mate.

36...♔xf7 37.♕g3 ♔g7!

Preparing 38...♘f4. But of course not 37...♘f4?? 38.♕xf4†.

38.♘c1 ♘f4
0–1

Final remarks

1. The reader should remember Black's 18...bxc5. This move played a key role as it made it difficult for White to advance his queenside majority. Meanwhile, Black had a healthy kingside attack based on advancing his central majority.
2. Although White was objectively no worse until move 33, he lacked targets and his position was quite difficult on a practical level. The key to everything was White's lack of a healthy pawn majority, since the passed c5-pawn was more of a weakness than a threat.

Philipp Schlosser – Loek van Wely

Belfort 2012

Learning objective: In this example Black achieves the ...c6-c5 break, and later obtains unpleasant pressure against White's d-pawn, which eventually decides the game.

1.c4 c6 2.♘f3 d5 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♕c2 ♗d6 7.♗b2 0–0 8.♗e2 b6 9.0–0 ♗b7 10.d4 ♖c8 11.e4

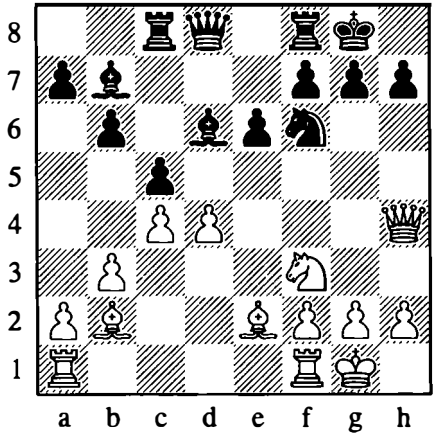
An alternative is 11.♖ac1 waiting for Black to take decisive action in the centre; after 11...c5 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♖fd1 ♕e7 14.g3 ♖fd8 15.cxd5 exd5 16.♘h4 ♗b8 we reach a hanging pawns structure with mutual chances, as in Ivanchuk – Aronian, Linares 2009.

11...♘xe4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♕xe4

We have reached the key structure, but Black's opening play has been very solid and he is ready to dispute White's control of the centre with:

13...♘f6 14.♕h4 c5!

Once again a well-timed ...c6-c5 break allows Black to release his position, equalizing the game.



15.♖ad1

Threatening dxc5 followed by ♗xf6 creating some weaknesses in Black's camp.

If 15.dxc5 ♖xc5 (15...♗xc5!?) 16.♖ad1 ♘e4! Black manages to fully equalize the game.

15...♘e4! 16.♕xd8?!

After this natural exchange White begins to struggle to maintain the balance; maybe he thought this would be enough for a draw? Let's see what happens.

An alternative is 16.♕h5 cxd4 17.♗xd4 ♕e7 18.♗d3 f5 when Black is comfortable, as in the game Caruana – Gustafsson, Rogaska Slatina 2009.

The strange-looking 16.d5 does not give Black problems after: 16...♕xh4 17.♘xh4 ♗e7 18.♘f3 (if 18.♗f3 Black has many good options, such as 18...♘xf2!? 19.♔xf2 ♗xh4† 20.g3 ♗g5 with level chances) 18...exd5 19.cxd5 ♖cd8 The d5-pawn is both a weakness and a strength, thus the position is approximately level.

The option 16.♕h3!? should be considered.

16...♖fxd8

It is now White who faces problems due to the central pressure.

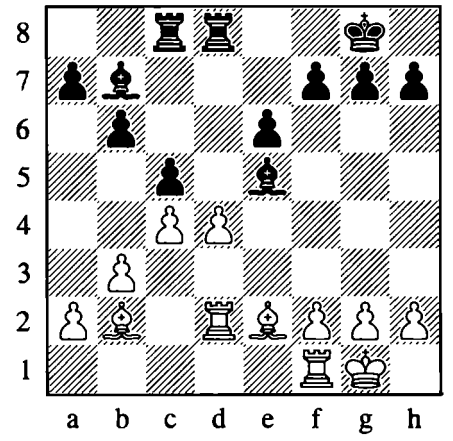
17.♘d2?!

Aiming to further simplify the position, but this is a fresh inaccuracy which only increases White's difficulties.

Instead 17.dxc5?! would not solve White's problems either: 17...♗xc5 18.♘e5 Black has many promising options at his disposal, for example: 18...♘xf2!? 19.♖xf2 ♖xd1† 20.♗xd1 ♖d8 21.♗e2 ♗xf2† 22.♔xf2 ♗xg2!∓ The bishop is immune, since 23.♔xg2? loses to 23...♖d2.

It is preferable to play 17.♗d3 cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♗b4 19.♘c2 ♗e7 after which Black's lead is very small.

17...♘xd2 18.♖xd2 ♗e5!∓



A nice move, pressuring White's main weakness, the d4-pawn. If instead 18...♗f4?! White simply replies 19.♖dd1 followed by dxc5 solving all his problems.

19.♖fd1 ♗f4

Well done! The two-step move ...♗e5-f4 puts White in an awkward position, since the d1-square is no longer free to allow ♖d2-d1.

20.♖c2

Even worse is 20.♖d3 ♗e4 21.♖h3 ♗f5 22.♖f3 ♗g5∓ when the rook is awkwardly placed on f3 and White is still under pressure.

20...♗e4 21.♗d3 ♗xd3 22.♖xd3 ♖d7!

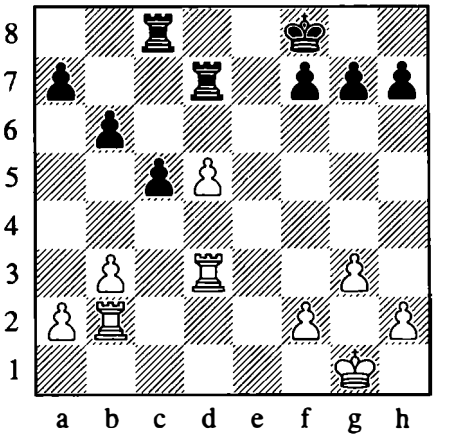
Preparing to double rooks on the d-file, while White cannot release the pressure on d4.

The tempting 22...cxd4!? does not work as well after: 23.♖xd4 (of course 23.♗xd4? loses to 23...e5) 23...♖xd4 24.♗xd4 ♖d8 Now White must give up a pawn. 25.g3 (25.♗e3?? ♖d1#) 25...♗xg3 (or 25...♖xd4 26.gxf4 ♖xf4 27.♖d2 with level chances) 26.♗xb6 ♗xh2† 27.♔xh2 axb6 The endgame arising is quite unclear, and after 28.c5 bxc5 29.♖xc5 it seems that White's two pawns on the queenside are more than enough to fight against Black's kingside pawns.

23.g3

Similar is 23.♖e2 ♖cd8 24.g3 ♗g5 25.d5 exd5 26.cxd5 ♔f8 with good winning chances for Black due to the weak d5-pawn.

23...♗e5 24.d5 ♗xb2 25.♖xb2 exd5 26.cxd5 ♔f8



We have reached an interesting rook endgame, which is somewhat typical of this pawn structure (once Black has released his position with ...c6-c5); therefore I will analyze a few variations to help explain Black's path to victory.

27.♖bd2 ♖e8 28.♔g2 ♔e7 29.♖e3†?!

The best practical chance is probably 29.d6† ♔d8 30.♖d5 ♖e6 and the d6-pawn becomes vulnerable as Black intends to follow up with ...♔c8-b7-c6 capturing it. 31.a3, attempting to play b3-b4 to open the c-file and make the king manoeuvre difficult, is met by: 31...a5!∓ Winning this endgame with Black will not be simple, but at least White cannot easily secure a draw either.

29...♔d8 30.♔f3 ♖de7 31.h4

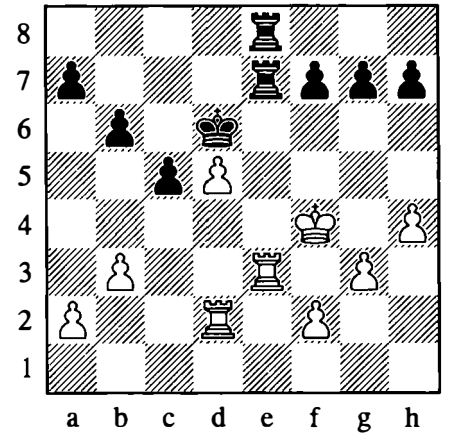
Transferring to a pawn endgame with 31.♖xe7?! ♖xe7∓ 32.♖e2? loses after 32...♖xe2! 33.♔xe2 ♔d7 34.♔d3 ♔d6 35.♔c4 a6 36.a4 h5 when White falls into zugzwang after 37.f4 g6 38.h3 f6 39.g4 h4 40.f5 g5.

Of course 31.d6? loses a pawn immediately after 31...♖xe3† 32.fxe3 ♔d7 followed by ...♖e6xd6.

31...♔d7 32.♔f4 ♔d6∓

Black's play has been so precise over the last few moves that I cannot find good suggestions for White to stay in the game. Black's king on

d6 is ideal and White's defensive task becomes extremely difficult.



33.g4 b5 34.g5

After 34.a4!? Black has many ways to improve his position. I suggest 34...b4! with the potential threat ...c5-c4 to create a strong passed pawn on b4.

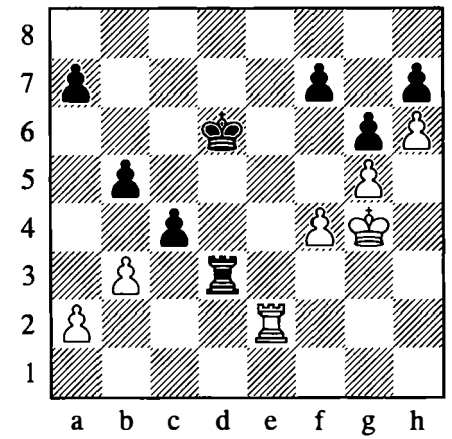
34...♖e5 35.h5

The alternative 35.♖de2 ♖xe3 36.fxe3 ♔xd5 37.e4† ♔e6∓ is not satisfactory for White either.

35...g6! 36.h6

White has achieved a threatening pawn on h6, though accurate play from Black will prevent the h7-pawn from being captured.

36...♖f5† 37.♔g4 ♖ee5 38.♖xe5 ♖xe5 39.f4 ♖xd5 40.♖c2 ♖d3 41.♖e2 c4–+



Black will now push his extra pawn and win easily as White lacks effective counterplay.

42.bxc4 bxc4 43.♖e8

43.♖c2 doesn't help; Black plays 43...c3 followed by ...♔d5-d4 and ...♖d2.

43...♖d5

Threatening ...c4-c3-c2 together with ...♖c5.

But not: 43...c3?? 44.♖d8† ♔c5 45.♖xd3+–

44.♔f3

If 44.♖d8† ♔c5 45.♖h8 ♖d7! 46.♔f3 (the optimistic 46.♖xh7?? runs into 46...f5†! 47.gxf6 ♖xh7–+) 46...c3 47.♖c8† ♔b4 White's lack of counterplay makes Black's winning task relatively simple, for example 48.♔e3 a5 49.♖c6 a4 50.♖c8 ♔a3 51.♖xc3† ♔xa2 and the rest is simple.

44...c3 45.♖d8†

Or 45.♔e3 c2 46.♖c8 ♖c5 47.♖xc5 ♔xc5 48.♔d2 ♔d4 49.♔xc2 ♔e4 and wins.

45...♔c5 46.♖c8† ♔d4 47.♖c7 ♔d3 48.♖xf7 c2 49.♖c7 ♔d2 50.♔e4 ♖d8
0–1

Final remarks

1. White lost almost without making a mistake. His biggest problem was in the opening, as when he played e3-e4 he knew he could not prevent ...c6-c5 which allowed Black to equalize easily.
2. Later, White's mistake was simplifying the position unfavourably with 16.♕xd8 and 17.♘d2. It seems like White assumed the position would be just equal, but he missed the pressure his d-pawn would face. Then Van Wely imposed his positional advantage with great precision.

Vadim Zvjaginsev – Alexander Evdokimov

64th Russian Championship, Taganrog 2011

Learning objective: This is an example of how Black may carry out the ...b7-b5 break, and how White can meet this break and turn the c6-pawn into a weakness.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♗f5 5.♘g3 ♗g6 6.♘f3 ♘d7 7.♗d3 e6 8.0–0 ♘gf6 9.b3 ♗e7 10.♗b2 0–0 11.c4

White enjoys a small advantage as is usual in this type of structure.

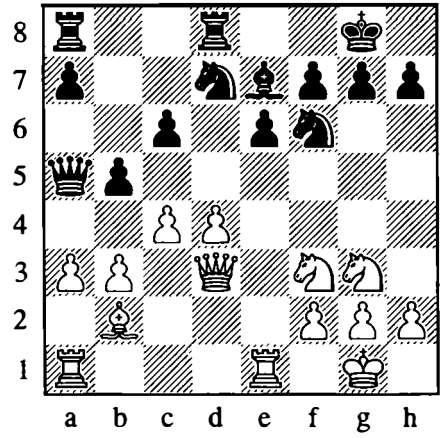
11...♕a5 12.a3

Preventing 12...♗a3.

If 12.♖e1 Black can trade bishops with 12...♗a3 thus decreasing his space problem.

12...♖fd8 13.♖e1 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 b5!?

The ...b7-b5 break is quite typical for this structure and it often gives Black decent counterplay.



15.♘f5!

White cannot afford to be careless in this position, for example 15.cxb5?! ♕xb5 16.♕c2 (after 16.♕xb5 cxb5 we reach an isolated queen pawn position, which in this case is favourable for Black due to the lack of attacking prospects for White) 16...c5 and Black has a very comfortable position.

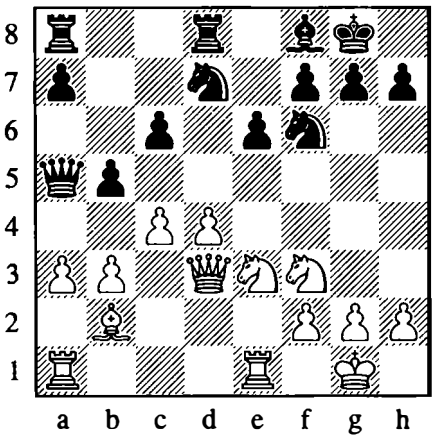
If 15.b4?! bxc4 16.♕xc4 ♕b5 17.♖ec1 a5 it is White who must play for equality, as the queenside pawns will be traded and he will be left with a weak isolated queen pawn.

Waiting with 15.♖e2?! does not work well either since 15...bxc4 16.bxc4 (16.♕xc4 ♕b5 and Black is okay here too) 16...♖ab8∓ gives Black good chances to exert pressure along the b-file. Note how weak the pawns on a3 and c4 have become.

15...♗f8

Critical is 15...exf5 16.♖xe7 bxc4 17.♕xc4 (if 17.bxc4 ♘e4 White's rook is awkwardly placed on e7) 17...♘d5 18.♖e2 ♖ab8 and the position is rather unclear since White has a better structure, but his bishop on b2 is quite useless at the moment.

16.♘e3±



After a very nice rearrangement, White is now ready to effectively meet the capture ...bxc4 with ♘xc4.

16...♖ab8 17.♕c2 bxc4

Preferable is 17...♕c7!? keeping the tension on the queenside: 18.♖ec1 a5 and if 19.cxb5?! (19.♗c3!?±) 19...♖xb5 Black is okay.

18.♘xc4 ♕b5 19.b4

The importance of White's manoeuvre ♘g3-f5-e3-c4 lies in the fact that Black is now unable to eliminate his queenside weaknesses with ...a7-a5. For this reason, White enjoys a lasting positional advantage.

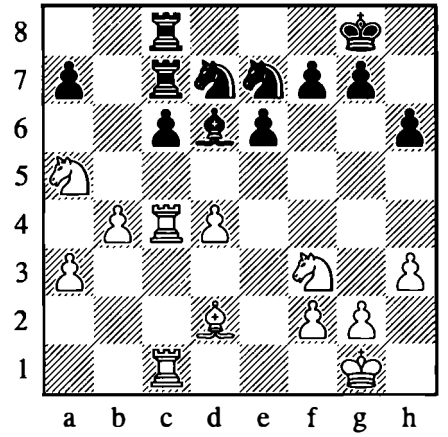
19...h6 20.♗c1 ♘d5 21.♗d2

White improves his bishop, which was previously useless on b2.

21...♖bc8 22.♖ac1 ♕a6 23.h3 ♖c7 24.♘a5 ♗d6 25.♕c4

Trading queens makes the weakness on c6 more accessible to White's pieces.

25...♕xc4 26.♖xc4 ♖dc8 27.♖ec1 ♘e7



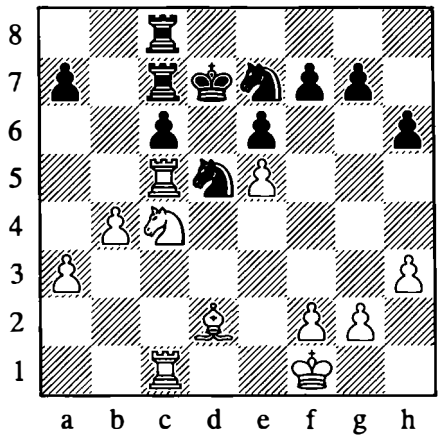
It is clear how White dominates the game, but it is not quite so easy to find a winning plan as Black's position remains solid.

28.♖4c2 ♘b6 29.♘e5

A good decision: Black is forced to give up his dark-squared bishop after which White not only gets rid of his isolated queen's pawn, but also gains good control of the dark squares.

If White first decides to improve his king with 29.♔f1 then Black has the option to play 29...f6!? depriving White of the e5-square.

29...♗xe5 30.dxe5 ♘bd5 31.♔f1 ♔f8 32.♖c5 ♔e8 33.♘c4 ♔d7



34.♖a5

Somewhat inaccurate. It is preferable to first centralize the king: 34.♔e2 ♘f5 35.♔d3 ♖d8 36.♔e4 and now White has many plans to improve, for example 36...♖dc8 37.g4 ♘fe7 38.♗e3!? (to be followed by ♖a5) 38...♘xe3 39.fxe3 ♘d5 40.♔f3± followed by e3-e4, ♖d1 or ♘d6 when Black is in serious trouble.

34...♘f5 35.♗e3?!

Another inaccuracy.

Now it is too late for 35.♔e2? due to 35...♘d4† 36.♔d3 ♘b3 winning an exchange.

White can preserve his advantage with: 35.♖c5!?±

35...♘fxe3† 36.fxe3 f6?

Black returns the favour. He missed 36...c5! 37.b5 ♖b8 38.♔e2 ♘b6 when the position is close to equal.

37.e4

37.♔e2!? was also strong.

37...♘b6 38.♖xa7?!

This questionable decision was possibly made under time pressure. It is unclear whether White can exploit his advantage in the arising rook endgame.

Instead 38.♘d2! allows White to preserve his

lead while keeping all options open: 38...fxe5 39.♖xe5 ♔d6 40.♖a5±

38...♘xc4 39.♖xc7† ♖xc7 40.♖xc4 fxe5

The rook endgame that has arisen is quite interesting though completely unrelated to the topic of this chapter. I encourage the reader to study it, though I will limit myself to pointing out just a few variations.

41.a4

The option 41.♔e2!? ♖a7 42.♖c3 certainly deserves study.

41...♖a7 42.a5 ♖b7 43.♔e2 ♖b5

This manoeuvre is necessary.

44.♔d3 c5!

Black is just in time; it is possible Zvjaginsev missed this when he played 38.♖xa7.

Instead, if Black simply waits with 44...♔d6 45.♔c3 ♖b7 (it is now too late for 45...c5? 46.♖xc5 ♖xc5† 47.bxc5† ♔xc5 48.a6 ♔b6 49.♔c4 ♔xa6 50.♔c5+–) 46.♔b3 ♖b5 47.♖c3 followed by ♔c4 and ♖d3 or ♖g3 when White is easily winning.

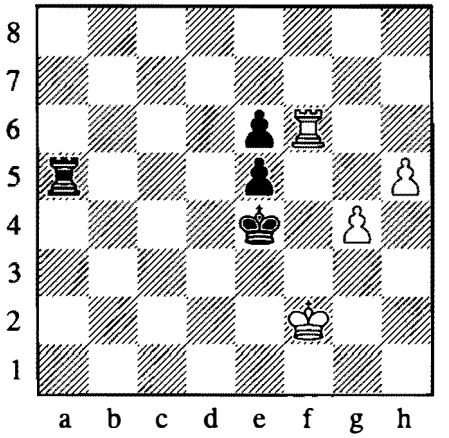
45.♖xc5 ♖xb4 46.♖c4 ♖b3† 47.♖c3 ♖b2 48.g4 ♖a2 49.♖c5 ♔d6 50.♖b5 ♖a4?!

It is better to play 50...g5 to prevent White's pawns from advancing on the kingside.

51.h4 ♖d4† 52.♔e3 ♖a4 53.h5 ♖a3† 54.♔d2 ♖a4 55.♔d3 ♖d4† 56.♔e3 ♖a4 57.♖b7 ♖a3† 58.♔f2 ♔c5?

Necessary is 58...♖xa5 59.♖xg7 ♖a4 60.♖g6 (60.♔e3 ♖a3† 61.♔e2 ♖a4=) 60...♖xe4 61.♔f3 ♖a4 62.♖xh6 which seems risky for Black, but maybe it is just a draw.

59.♖xg7 ♖xa5 60.♖g6 ♔d4 61.♖xh6 ♔xe4 62.♖f6!+–



The rest is simple for White as the g- and h-pawns are unstoppable.

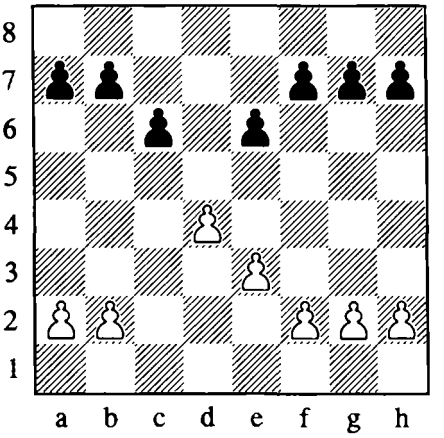
62...♖a1 63.♔g2 ♖a2† 64.♖f2 ♖a8 65.h6 ♖h8 66.g5 ♔d3 67.♖f7 ♖g8 68.♖g7
1–0

Final remarks

1. The reader should remember how threatening the ...b7-b5 break can be. The response cxb5 is often unsatisfactory as it gives up the d5-square permanently and makes White's queenside vulnerable.
2. Allowing Black to achieve the trades ...b5xc4 and b3xc4 enables Black to gain good counterplay along the b-file.
3. For this reason, the most memorable point in this game was Zvjaginsev's idea 15.♘f5 followed by 16.♘e3 and later recapturing with ♘xc4. This turned the c6-pawn into a permanent weakness, while preventing Black's further breaks with ...c6-c5 or ...a6-a5.

Chapter 4

Slav Formation



The Slav formation could very well also be called the Queen's Gambit Accepted formation, as it originates from Black capturing ...dxc4 in a Queen's Gambit position. This structure shares many common features with the Caro-Kann structure we studied in the previous chapter. To start, Black's pawn trade ...dxc4 still results in:

1. White gaining better control of the centre.
2. White having more space by virtue of a pawn on the fourth rank. Similarly to the previous chapter, White has a comfortable advantage in this structure, and Black should hope to break free with a central break.

Specific plans can be formulated as follows:

White's plans

The control of the centre opens up multiple opportunities for White everywhere on the board. Similarly to the previous chapter, White has the plans:

1. Creating a kingside attack, this time with h2-h4-h5-h6 (or hxg6 if applicable) and possibly e3-e4-e5.
2. Placing knights on the strong outposts e5 and c5, controlling the centre.
3. Playing e4-e5 to fix the centre and control the d6-square (similar to c4-c5 in the previous chapter).

Unlike the previous chapter, White also has the possibility of:

4. Carrying out a minority attack with a2-a4 and b2-b4-b5, in order to create a weakness on the queenside.
5. Simply gaining space with b2-b4, as well as preventing the ...c6-c5 break. This is far more likely than playing f2-f4 in the Caro-Kann structure, simply because f2-f4 weakens White's king somewhat.

Black's plans

The main objective is to dispute White's centre and transform the structure. This can be achieved by:

1. Breaking in the centre with ...c6-c5, probably obtaining a symmetrical position after dxc5, or an isolani after ...c5xd4.
2. Breaking in the centre with ...e6-e5 will probably produce a 4–2 versus 3–3 pawn structure with roughly level chances.
3. Exerting pressure on the d4-pawn once e3-e4 has been played.
4. Disrupting White's centre with ...f7-f5. This is analogous to the plan ...b7-b5 in the Caro-Kann structure.

Similarly to the previous chapter, White's plans aim for an advantage, while most of Black's plans

aim to equalize by transforming the structure. Black's Plan 3 rarely works, either because the d4-pawn can be easily defended, or because White players know when to refrain from e3-e4, exactly in order to prevent this plan. It should be noted that Black's Plan 2 is more likely to be achieved, since White can often prevent Plan 1 by placing a rook on the open c-file.

Outposts

Black may place a knight on his d5-outpost, but this knight cannot compete with White's knights placed on the e5- and c5-squares. White can easily push e3-e4 to get rid of the knight on d5, if it is absolutely necessary. In contrast, White's knights on c5 or e5 are harder to deal with, as they are on the fifth rank, and Black cannot easily expel them. Chasing them away with ...f7-f6 and ...b7-b6 would create serious weaknesses on e6 and c6 respectively.

The first example in this chapter illustrates White's attacking chances on the kingside, while the second game is an example of White's positional advantage in an endgame in which Black loses by asphyxiation. The third and fourth games are devoted to the central breaks ...c6-c5 and ...e6-e5 respectively. The last game in the chapter is a combination of Black's Plans 3 and 4. The chapter finishes with a short fragment to exemplify White's Plan 3.

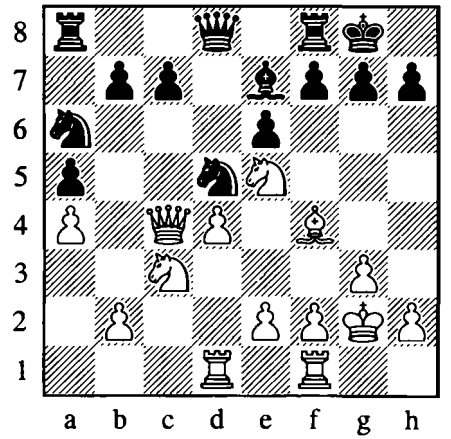
Levon Aronian – Zong Yuan Zhao

Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates White's chances for a kingside attack.
2. The advance h2-h4 is typical and strong. Since White controls the centre he may carry out this advance without weakening his position.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.d4 dxc4 7.♕c2 a6 8.a4 ♗d7 9.♕xc4 ♗c6 10.♗f4 a5 11.♘c3 ♘a6 12.♘e5 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♘d5 14.♖ad1



14...c6

An alternative was 14...♘xf4† 15.gxf4 ♗d6 16.e3 with an approximate balance. The reader should know that White's doubled-pawns are more of a strength than a weakness in this position, as the central mass d4-e3-f2-f4 is solid, offers good control of the centre, and gives White an open g-file to press against Black's king.

15.♗c1 ♘ab4

The alternative 15...♘xc3 only reinforces White's centre after: 16.bxc3 ♕d5† 17.f3 ♕xc4 18.♘xc4±

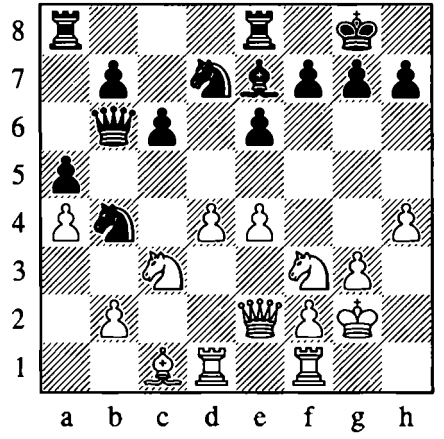
16.e4 ♘b6 17.♕e2 ♘d7 18.♘f3

Of course White does not wish to trade pieces in this position.

18...♖e8 19.h4

This is a standard idea. Since White has better control of the centre, he can embark on kingside operations without fear.

19...♕b6



20.♘g5!?

The beginning of a very interesting and illustrative attack.

Instead, White could have fought for a small positional advantage after 20.♗f4!? ♖ad8 21.♘d2± followed by ♘c4 with a slightly preferable position since 21...♕xd4? is refuted by 22.♘c4 ♕a7 23.♗c7 winning an exchange.

20...h6

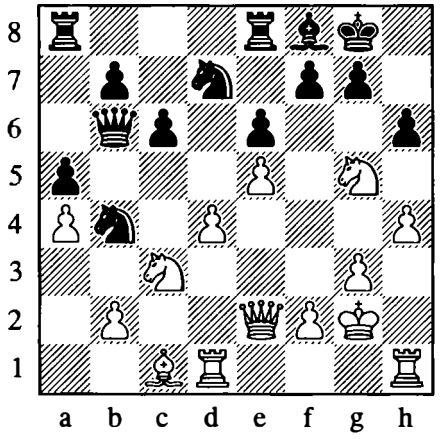
Black decides to accept the challenge.

The more passive 20...♘f8 gives White a pleasant choice between 21.♗e3± with a stable advantage due to superior control of the centre, or 21.♕h5!? ♗xg5 22.hxg5 with attacking prospects down the h-file.

21.♖h1 ♗f8

The knight is immune as after 21...hxg5? 22.hxg5 Black's pieces do not have the mobility to react quickly enough to the many threats down the h-file. 22...g6 23.♕f3! (threatening ♖h8†!) 23...f5 (but not 23...♕d8? 24.♖h8†! ♔xh8 25.♕xf7 followed by ♖h1#) 24.gxf6 ♗xf6 25.♖h6! With a decisive attack after either 25...♖e7 26.♖xg6† ♖g7 27.♕h5 ♕d8 28.♖h6 or 25...♔g7 26.♕g4 ♘f8 27.e5 ♗d8 28.♘e4.

22.e5



A logical continuation, allowing ♘c3-e4 to bring another piece into the attack. Additionally, the e5-pawn is a powerful attacking tool, as it prevents Black from placing a knight on f6, protecting the kingside.

22...f5?

This is the first and only mistake Black committed in the game.

The knight cannot be taken:
22...hxg5? 23.hxg5 g6 24.♕f3!
The most precise, threatening 25.♖h8†!.
Another path to victory is: 24.♘e4!?
24...♗g7
The only move; the following variation illustrates White's attacking potential to its maximum:
24...♖e7?! 25.♘e4 ♗g7 26.♘f6† ♔f8 27.♖h7 ♘d5 28.♖dh1 ♖d8 29.♘xd7† ♖exd7 30.♕f6!! when checkmate is unstoppable.

Also 24...♕d8? loses immediately to 25.♖h8†! ♔xh8 26.♕xf7 followed by ♖h1.

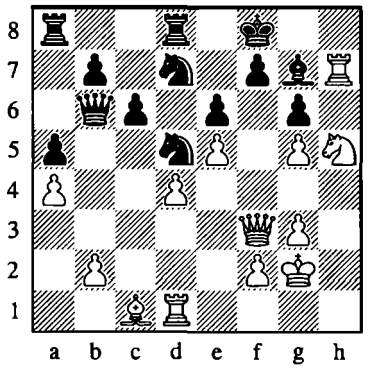
25.♘e4

Here Black has many choices to attempt a defence, but they all fail in a similar fashion. As an example I offer the variation:

25...♖ed8 26.♘f6† ♔f8

26...♘xf6? only makes things easier: 27.gxf6 ♗f8 28.♕g4 followed by ♕h4-h8 mating.

27.♖h7 ♘d5 28.♘h5!

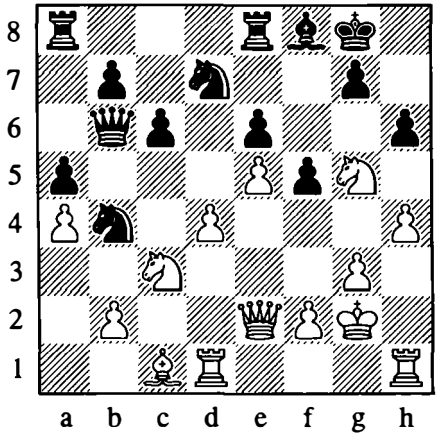


The key move, Black is defenceless after:

28...gxh5 29.g6 f5 30.♗h6! ♗xh6 31.♕xh5 ♗g7 32.♖xg7!

With forced mate.

Instead of 22...f5? Black should have reacted in the centre with 22...c5! undermining the d4-e5 chain and bringing the queen into the game with ...♕b6-c6. Then 23.♘f3!? with a complicated game (the obstinate 23.♕h5? is met by 23...g6 24.♕f3 hxg5 25.h5 ♕c6 when Black has more than enough resources to defend).



23.♕h5! ♖e7 24.♕g6!+–

Forcing Black to open the h-file thus allowing the entrance of White's forces:

24...hxg5 25.hxg5

The threat is ♖h4, ♖dh1 and ♖h8#.

25...c5

Black cannot escape with 25...♖ee8 due to 26.♖h8†! ♔xh8 27.♕f7 followed by ♖h1#.

26.♘b5!

Intending to follow with ♘d6 and ♕h7#.

26...♕c6†

Again 26...♖ee8 loses to 27.♖h8†! ♔xh8 28.♕f7 with forced mate.

27.f3 cxd4 28.♕h7†

Black resigns, since after 28...♔f7 29.♘d6† the queen is lost.

1–0

Final remarks

1. White's kingside attack can be very powerful and requires extreme precision from Black's defence.
2. This flank attack should have been met with the conceptually correct central break 22...c5!.
3. In retrospect, it might have been objectively better to play 20.♗f4 securing a small positional edge, though practical chances should not be ignored. It is true that Black had one way to maintain equality against White's attack; but how strong does a player need to be in order to find such a precise continuation? The strong GM Zhao was unable to defend, so I believe White's attack is possibly the strongest continuation, at least on a practical level.

Al. Morozevich – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Beijing 2013

Learning objectives:
1. Black needs to achieve either ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5 in order to release his position.
2. This game illustrates how White can break through Black's passive defence if neither of these breaks is achieved.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0–0 5.d4 c6 6.0–0 d5 7.♕b3 dxc4 8.♕xc4

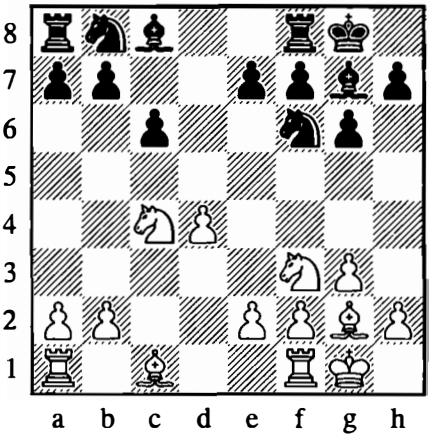
Having a half-point lead in the Beijing Grand Prix tournament, Mamedyarov chose this rare sideline, offering to get the queens off the board soon.

8...♕d5 9.♘bd2!?

And surprisingly, Morozevich (a well-known tactician) responds with another rare move (a novelty after only 9 moves) accepting entry into an endgame.

Previously 9.♕a4!? had been played with success.

9...♕xc4 10.♘xc4



This is a key moment in the game and deserves some comment. With the queens off the board, Black is very unlikely to face a mating attack like we saw in the previous game. But does this mean Black can secure a draw? Not necessarily. Neutralizing White's space advantage is not easy even without queens, and the key question is whether Black will be able to free his position with ...c6-c5 or ...e7-e5 in order to dispute White's central dominance. If that is not the case, White will enjoy a lasting positional advantage and the defensive task will require Black to constantly calculate how to defend against possible breaks, giving him little hope in a practical game where errors cannot be completely avoided.

10...♗e6

The alternative 10...♘bd7 does not seem to change things much after: 11.b3 ♘b6 (Black cannot break in the centre with 11...c5? 12.♗a3! as Black will have a serious struggle to complete his development without losing material, for example 12...♘d5 13.♖ac1 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd5 ♗f6 16.♖fd1±) 12.♘a5! Avoiding the exchange of pieces, and preventing Black from developing his bishop due to the pressure on b7. 12...♖d8 13.♗a3 ♘bd5 14.♖ac1± This is similar to the game.

11.b3 ♗d5

The alternative 11...♘e4 12.♗a3 ♖e8 (the break 12...c5? fails due to 13.♘fe5!±) 13.♖ac1 is similar to the game.

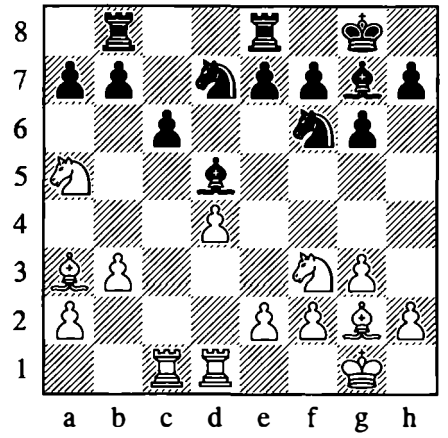
The try 11...♗xc4 12.bxc4 ♘e4 (hoping for ...c6-c5) is met by 13.♖b1! b6 (or 13...♘c3?! 14.♖xb7 ♘xe2† 15.♔h1 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♗xd4 17.♖xe7±) 14.♗f4± followed by ♘e5 with a comfortable edge.

12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♖ac1 ♘bd7 14.♘a5

The knight will be ideally located on a5, pressuring the b7-pawn and preventing ...b7-b6 due to ♘xc6.

14...♖ab8 15.♖fd1±

It becomes clear that Black will not easily be able to dispute White's centre, thus falling into a permanently inferior position.



15...♗f8

The break 15...e5? fails due to 16.♘xe5 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♖xe5 18.♗d6 winning the exchange.

Nor does it help to play: 15...♘e4 16.♘d2 (White needs to trade some pieces in order to be able to push the desired e2-e4 gaining central control) 16...♘df6 (or 16...♘xd2 17.♗xd5 cxd5 18.♖xd2± when the character of the game has changed, but White retains his advantage by controlling the only open file) 17.♘xe4 ♘xe4 18.f3 ♘d6 19.e4 ♗e6 White dominates and may continue to improve his position with 20.♗c5 ♘c8 21.f4 ♘b6 22.h3± intending to gain even more space with g3-g4.

The attempt 15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♗f8 intending to follow up with ...e7-e5 can be met by 17.♗b2 e5 18.dxe5 ♘xe5 19.♗g2 where the pair of bishops and excellent piece coordination secure an advantage for White, for example: 19...♗b4 20.♘c4 ♘xc4 21.♗xf6 ♘d6 22.♔f1±

16.♘e5 ♗xg2

Keeping more pieces on the board with 16...♗e6?! is unlikely to help Black due to his lack of space.

17.♔xg2 e6

Worse is 17...♘xe5 18.dxe5 ♘d5 19.e4 ♘b6 20.♖c3 followed by ♖cd3 controlling the only open file.

18.♗xf8 ♔xf8 19.♘ec4 ♔e7

But not 19...e5? due to 20.♘d6 ♖e7 21.♘axb7 and wins.

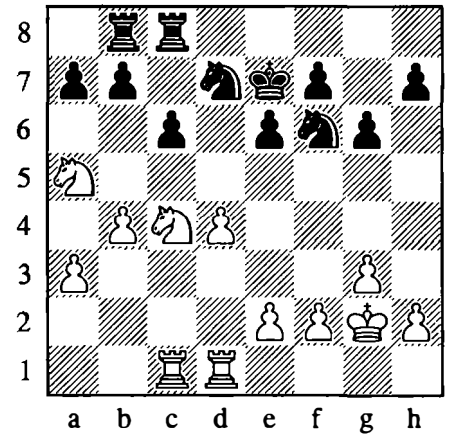
20.b4

Preventing the break ...c6-c5.

20...♖ec8

20...♘b6 21.♘e5 ♘fd7 22.♘axc6† bxc6 23.♘xc6† ♔d6 24.♘xb8 ♖xb8 25.e4±

21.a3



21...g5!

A good decision, as Black needs to claim some space in order not to be asphyxiated by White's potential expansion with e2-e4, f2-f4, h2-h3 and g3-g4.

White should constantly calculate liberation attempts, such as 21...b6?! 22.♘b3 c5?! but fortunately for White, in this case this attempt is refuted by 23.dxc5 bxc5 24.♘ca5!± winning material.

22.♘b2

A prophylactic move, preventing freeing attempts with ...b7-b6 followed by ...c6-c5 as mentioned in the previous note.

22...♘e8 23.♘d3

Note how both knights are ideally arranged to pressure Black's queenside and prevent liberation.

23...f5 24.h4!

Gaining control of the f4-square.

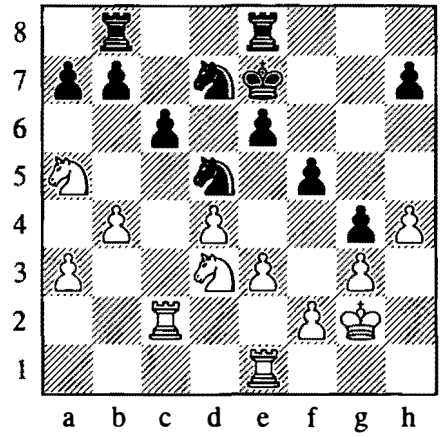
24...g4

But not 24...gxh4? 25.♖h1! ♘ef6 (even worse is 25...hxg3? 26.♖xh7† ♔d8 27.♘f4) 26.♖xh4± and the h7-pawn has become a serious weakness.

A bad idea would be 24...h6?! 25.hxg5 hxg5 26.♖h1 ♘ef6 27.♘e5!± when only White will take advantage of the open h-file.

25.♘f4 ♘ef6 26.♖c2 ♘d5 27.♘d3 ♖f8 28.e3 ♖fe8 29.♖e1

Speculating on a potential e3-e4. Note how Black constantly needs to calculate how to defend against potential threats, while White can choose his moves almost randomly. A practical strategy for White is to continuously present Black with potential threats, but without carrying out any of them until the right time has come. Often White will continue to use this strategy until Black commits a serious mistake, or finds himself in time trouble, and only then will White embark on decisive action.



29...♘5f6

Preventing e3-e4. To illustrate how delicate Black's position is, note how the natural 29...♖f8 falls into trouble after 30.♖b2! (threatening ♘c5 winning a pawn) 30...♖fc8 31.e4! fxe4 32.♖xe4± and Black is on the verge of losing.

30.♖b1

Threatening ♘c5 winning a pawn.

30...♖ec8 31.♖bc1 ♖d8?!

More stubborn was 31...♘b6.

32.a4!±

Preparing a break with b4-b5 in order to invade Black's camp via the c-file.

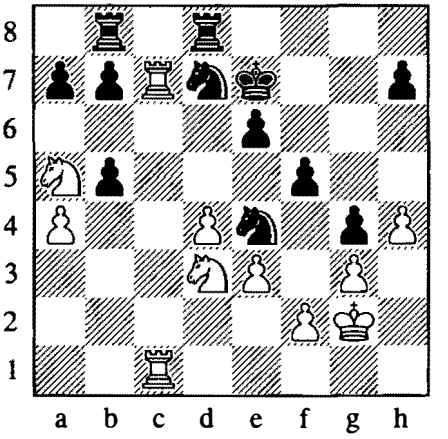
32...♘e4?

Mamedyarov miscalculates in an already very difficult situation.

The correct defence was 32...♘e8! 33.b5 cxb5 34.axb5 ♘d6 35.♖c7 ♘xb5 36.♖xb7 ♖xb7 37.♘xb7 ♖b8 38.♘a5± though Black's position is full of weaknesses.

33.b5 cxb5 34.♖c7!

This would have been prevented if Black's knight had been on e8.



34...♘d6

34...bxa4? loses to 35.♘xb7 ♖e8 36.♘e5 ♘ef6 37.♘c6†.

35.♘c5 bxa4?!

A better defence was 35...♘e8 36.♖xb7 ♖xb7 37.♘cxb7 ♖a8 38.axb5 though Black's position is practically lost.

36.♘cxb7 ♘xb7 37.♘xb7 ♖f8 38.♖1c6!+–

Black's position falls apart due to the threat of 39.♘c5.

38...♖f7 39.♘c5 ♔e8 40.♖xe6† ♔d8 41.♖ec6

Black resigns as the a7- and a4-pawns will soon be lost.

1–0

Final remarks

1. If Black wishes to equalize, it is absolutely necessary to find a break by either ...e6-e5 or ...c6-c5.
2. The endgame starting on move 19 was nearly lost on a practical level. The reason is that Black could not create any counterplay or find any way to equalize. Meanwhile, White could move his pieces around the entire board, speculating with multiple threats. Even Super-GMs like Mamedyarov cannot avoid decisive mistakes under such circumstances.

As the reader may have observed in the previous game, White was better in every variation throughout the entire game. Even more significantly, Super-GM Mamedyarov lost without much of a fight, without having committed any major mistakes. So the question is: what is Black supposed to do in order to avoid such a painful loss? My answer to this question is that whenever Black is considering whether to play this pawn structure, he should carefully analyze whether he has reasonable chances to achieve liberation with ...c6-c5 (or ...e6-e5). If these breaks are not possible, he is likely to fall into passive defence.

Jon Ludvig Hammer – Magnus Carlsen

Sandnes 2013

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of a position in which Black is likely to achieve the ...c6-c5 break.
2. After the break is achieved, Black has to parry some threats. But once these threats are neutralized, it is Black who plays for the advantage.

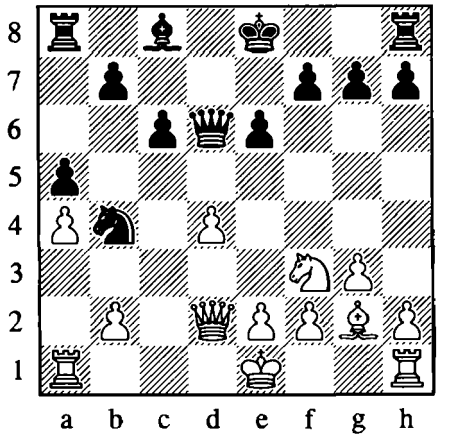
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 ♗b4† 6.♗d2 a5 7.♕c2 ♗xd2† 8.♕xd2 c6 9.a4

The alternative 9.♘e5 can lead to a complicated position after 9...b5 10.a4!? when White has pressure on the queenside and centre, in compensation for Black's extra pawn (or 10.♘xc6 ♕c7=).

9...♘e4 10.♕c2 ♘d6

Black will not give up the c4-pawn without trading another piece to alleviate his space problem.

11.♘bd2 ♘a6 12.♘xc4 ♘b4 13.♘xd6† ♕xd6 14.♕d2



We have reached the position of interest, and the reader should pay close attention to the differences between this game and the previous one. In the current game, two minor pieces are

off the board already, decreasing Black's space problem. In addition, the moves a2-a4 and ...a7-a5 greatly favour Black, as they give a strong square for the knight on b4 and have eliminated White's chances to expand on the queenside in the future with the usual b2-b4. Finally, Black has a concrete plan, which is ...b7-b6, ...♗a6 (or ...♗b7) followed by placing the rooks in the centre and pushing ...c6-c5. Unlike the previous game, White lacks pieces to prevent such liberation. For all the above reasons, the reader should understand that Black has chosen correctly when he decided to play this pawn structure.

14...0–0 15.0–0 ♖d8 16.♖fd1 b6 17.♕c3

The alternative 17.♘e5 is not enough to prevent Black's liberation either: 17...♗a6 18.♖ac1 ♖ac8 19.♘c4 ♗xc4 20.♖xc4 c5 and Black has fully equalized.

17...♗a6 18.♖d2

If 18.e4?! Black is ready to break in the centre with 18...c5!∓ taking the lead, since 19.dxc5? loses to 19...♕xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♖xd1† 21.♘e1 ♘c2! 22.♕xc2 ♖xe1† 23.♗f1 ♗xf1.

18...♖ac8 19.♖ad1

Placing both rooks on the d-file is correct, as White needs to fight for the initiative once the ...c6-c5 break comes.

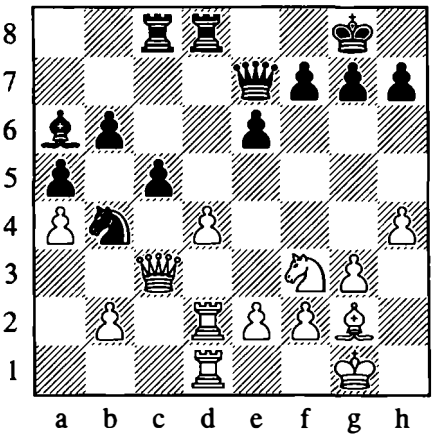
19...♕e7

Preparing c6-c5; of course not 19...c5? 20.dxc5.

20.h4 c5

Black achieves the desired break, disputing White's control of the centre.

Also possible was 20...♖d6!? in order to further prepare the ...c6-c5 break.



21.dxc5 ♖d5!?

An interesting intermediate move, preparing ...♖cxc5.

Another option was: 21...♖xd2 22.♕xd2 ♕xc5 23.♘e5!? This is White's only chance to fight for an advantage, but after 23...♘d5 there is nothing special for White, for example 24.♗xd5 ♕xd5 25.♕xd5 exd5 26.e3 f6 27.♘d7 ♖c2 with a level game.

22.♖xd5

A good alternative was: 22.♘g5!? ♖cxc5 23.♕e3 ♖xd2 24.♕xd2 (threatening ♕d8) 24...♖c8 25.♕d7 ♕xd7 26.♖xd7 ♗xe2 27.♘xf7±

22...♘xd5 23.♕e5 ♕xc5

Black has fully equalized.

24.♗h3

Threatening ♗xe6.

If White tries 24.♘d4 threatening ♘xe6, Black equalizes with the forced line 24...♘c3! 25.♕xc5 bxc5 26.bxc3 cxd4 27.cxd4 ♗xe2.

Or 24.♘g5 ♘f6! 25.♕xc5 bxc5 26.e3 ♖b8 with mutual chances.

24...♖e8 25.♘d4

Reinforcing the threat on e6; alternatively, 25.♘g5 ♘f6 26.♕xc5 bxc5 with a level endgame.

25...♔f8

A curious move.

26.♗f1

Or 26.e4 ♘b4 27.♕xc5† bxc5 28.♘b5 ♔e7 with a balanced endgame.

26...♖c8 27.♘b5?

This mistake is hard to understand.

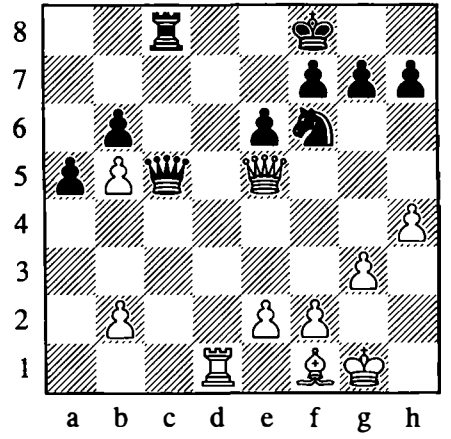
Better was 27.♘f5 ♘f6 28.♕xc5† ♖xc5 29.♖d8† ♘e8 30.♘d6 ♔e7 31.♖xe8† ♔xd6 32.♖b8 ♖c6 with approximate equality, though I find Black's position slightly preferable since his king is very close to White's weakened queenside.

On the other hand 27.e4? is bad: 27...♗xf1 28.exd5 (or 28.♖xf1 ♘f6 29.♕xc5† ♖xc5∓) 28...♗c4∓ winning a pawn.

27...♗xb5 28.axb5 ♘f6!

Now White's position becomes very difficult due to the weak b2- and b5-pawns.

The pawn is untouchable: 28...♕xb5? 29.e4 when White wins the knight after 29...♕a4 30.b3! (the only move) 30...♕xb3 31.♖d3 followed by exd5 since here 31...♘c3? allows mate by: 32.♕d6† ♔g8 (32...♔e8 33.♕d7†) 33.♕d8† ♖xd8 34.♖xd8#



29.♕d6†

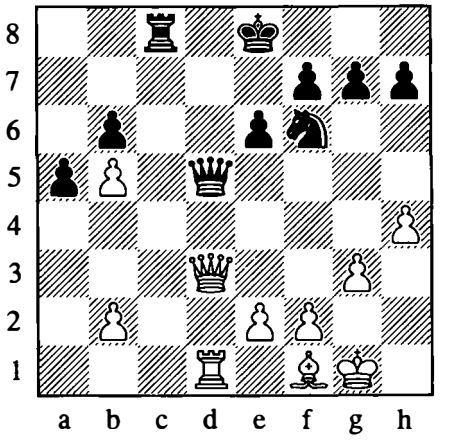
29.♕f4 ♕xb5∓

29...♔e8

Also possible was 29...♕xd6 30.♖xd6 ♘d5 31.e4 ♔e7 32.e5 ♖c1∓ followed by ...♖b1xb2 when the a5-pawn should decide the game.

30.♕d3 ♕d5!∓

Forcing the trade of queens under ideal circumstances, as Black's king is already closer to the battlefield, and White's b-pawns are very weak.



31.♕xd5 exd5 32.e4!?

White is desperately looking for counterplay. Passive defence with 32.♖d2 does not help: 32...♔e7 33.e3 ♖c1 34.f3 ♔d6 35.♔f2 ♔c5∓ when White's queenside weaknesses and Black's strong king should tell.

32...♖c2!?

A good practical decision, depriving White of counterplay. Technically 32...dxe4 works, but White gains some counterplay with 33.♖d6.

33.e5?!

Preferable was 33.exd5 ♖xb2∓ when Black's a5-pawn is much more dangerous than the isolated d5-pawn.

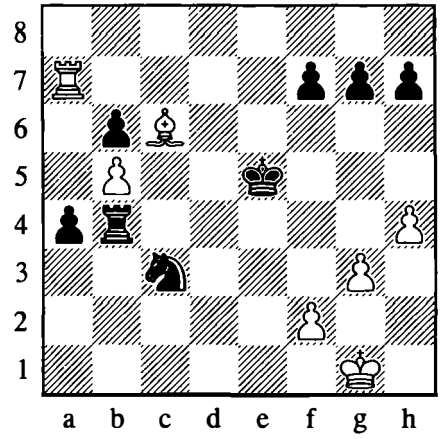
33...♘e4 34.♖xd5 ♖xb2–+

The a5-pawn now decides the game.

35.♖d4 ♖b4 36.♖d1

Instead 36.♖xb4? axb4 loses immediately, since White must give up his bishop for the pawn.

36...a4 37.♗g2 ♘c3 38.♗c6† ♔e7 39.♖d7† ♔e6 40.♖a7 ♔xe5



White resigns since the a4-pawn cannot be stopped without great material loss.
0–1

Final remarks

1. The main message of this game is that White cannot really hope for an advantage if he is unable to prevent a ...c6-c5 break.
2. A crucial role was played by the weakening move a2-a4 and Black's knight on b4, which substantially limited the coordination of White's pieces. For example, on moves 17-19 White would have liked to play ♖ac1, but could not due to ...♘a2 winning an exchange.

Levon Aronian – David Navara

Wijk aan Zee 2012

Learning objective: This game is an illustration of how Black may carry out the ...e6-e5 break.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗g7 7.e4 ♗g4

A logical move, undermining White's centre due to the threat of ..♗xf3 followed by ...♗xd4.

Instead taking the pawn with 7...♗xd4? is simply unjustified, for example 8.♗h6!? prevents Black from castling, and can be followed by ♖d1 with strong pressure.

8.♗b5† c6 9.♘g5 0–0 10.♗e2 ♗xe2 11.♘xe2 ♘a6

This move became the main line after this game. Developing the knight via a6 facilitates the key manoeuvre ...♕d6-b4 attempting to trade queens.

Previously 11...♘8d7 had been played in the game Gordon – Bok, Germany 2011, where White gained an initiative after 12.♕h3 (another option was 12.e5!?±) 12...h6 13.♘f3 h5 14.e5!? with the potential threat e5-e6.

11...♗xd4? is not possible due to the brute-force response 12.♕h3 h5 13.g4! followed by gxh5 with an attack.

12.♗e3

An alternative was 12.♕h3!? h6 13.♘f3 h5 14.g4 with great complications, as in the game Navara – Hammer, Tromsø 2013.

12...♕d6

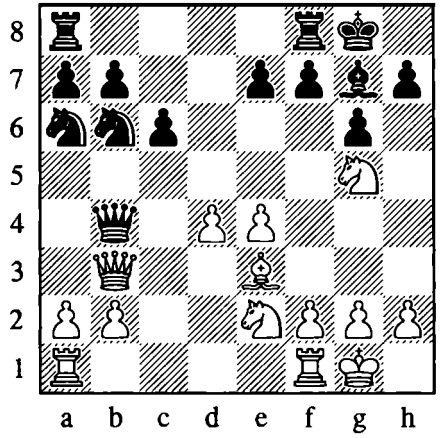
This is Black's clearest route to equality, aiming to trade queens before liberating his position with ...e7-e5.

The alternative 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♗xe5 14.f4 ♗g7 15.0–0 gives White a very slightly preferable

position, as he controls the centre better and may potentially seize the initiative with e4-e5 or f4-f5.

13.0–0 ♕b4!

The option 13...c5 is not advisable due to 14.♖ad1 cxd4 15.♗xd4± but 13...e5 was a reasonable alternative, for example 14.♖ad1 exd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4.



A key moment during the game. Simple calculation should allow White to realize he is no longer able to prevent Black's successful liberation with ...e7-e5 (or ...c6-c5) therefore it is necessary to accurately calculate what position will be best to neutralize Black's initiative once this break is accomplished.

14.♕xb4?!

Allowing the knight to come to b4 makes White's position quite vulnerable due to the positional threat ...♘c2xe3. It is possible that Aronian was dissatisfied with 14.♕c2 due to 14...e5 (or Black can insist on the queen trade with 14...♕c4!?) 15.♖ad1 exd4 16.♘xd4 ♖ad8 when Black's position is very slightly preferable due to the pressure on the centre.

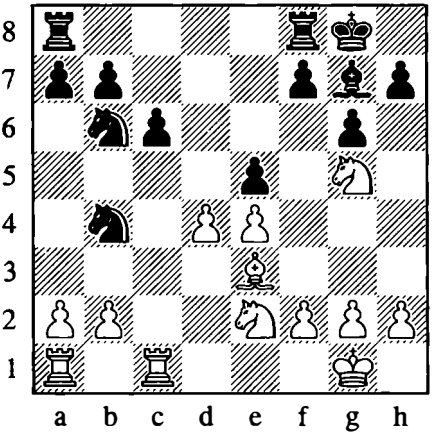
14...♘xb4 15.♖fc1

If 15.♘f3 to prevent ...e7-e5, then 15...♘c2 16.♖ac1 ♘xe3 17.fxe3 e5! when Black's position is preferable, and of course White does not wish to reply: 18.♘xe5? ♗xe5 19.dxe5 ♖ae8∓

Of course not 15.♖ac1? ♘xa2.

15...e5!∓

A timely liberation for Black.



16.♘f3

16.dxe5 ♗xe5 17.♗c5 ♘d3! 18.♗xf8 ♘xc1 19.♖xc1 ♖xf8∓

16...exd4 17.♗xd4 ♖fe8

The e4-pawn is suddenly a weakness.

18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♘g3?!

Bringing the pieces too far away from the queenside.

If 19.♘c3 ♖ad8 20.♖d1 ♘d3 Black's position is slightly preferable.

19...♖ad8 20.♘e1

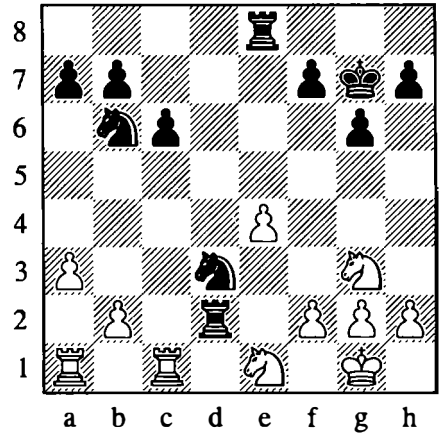
The logical 20.♖d1?! fighting for the d-file fails due to 20...♘a4! attacking the b2-pawn; after 21.♖ab1 ♖xd1† 22.♖xd1 ♖e7 protecting the seventh rank (but not 22...♘xb2? 23.♖d7 with counterplay) 23.♖b1 ♖d7∓ and White is about to lose a pawn.

20...♖d2

The alternative was 20...♖d7!? (threatening ...h5-h4 followed by ..♖xe4) 21.f3 ♖ed8 controlling the only open file with a big advantage.

21.a3 ♘d3?!

Inaccurate. Better was 21...♘a6 22.b4 ♘c7 when the queenside pawns are very weak.



22.♘xd3?!

White returns the favour and now his position becomes very difficult to hold due to the weak pawns on b2 and e4.

As GM Krasenkow suggests, 22.♘f1! was the right defence: 22...♘xc1 23.♘xd2 ♖d8 24.♖xc1 ♖xd2 25.♖c2 and White seems to be holding though Black's position is still preferable.

22...♖xd3 23.♖ab1

Slightly better was 23.f3 but after 23...♖ed8 Black controls the game.

23...♖e5!∓

A good move, planning the transfer ...♖e5-b5 pressing against the b2-pawn and forcing White to give up a pawn.

24.♖d1 ♖xd1† 25.♖xd1 ♖b5 26.b4 ♘c4 27.♖d3 a5!

The key move.

28.bxa5

28.♖b3 does not help, as 28...c5 wins.

28...♖xa5 29.f4 ♖xa3

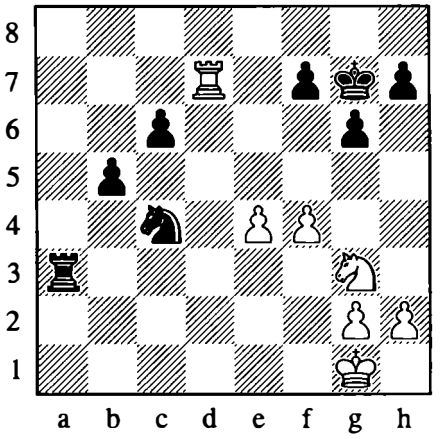
Black's strategy has been a success, but the game is not over yet due to:

30.♖d7!

Aronian has not given up and he now embarks on some sharp counterplay.

30...b5

The race begins.



31.e5 b4

If 31...♔f8 32.♘e4! and the game suddenly becomes unclear due to the threats ♘g5 and ♘f6.

32.e6 b3 33.♖xf7†

The alternative was 33.e7!? b2 34.e8=♕ b1=♕† 35.♘f1 ♕f5∓ though Black's position is very promising due to the extra pawn and White's slightly more exposed king.

33...♔h6 34.♖b7 b2 35.♔f2 ♖a7

Or 35...♖a2!? transposing into the game continuation.

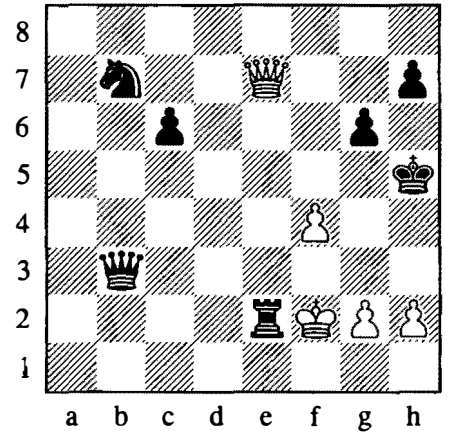
36.♖b8 ♖a8 37.♖b7 ♖a2 38.♘e2 ♘d6! 39.e7!

But not 39.♖b8? ♔g7 followed by ...♔f6 winning.

39...♘xb7 40.e8=♕ b1=♕

The game is technically won for Black though White still managed to find some resources against Black's awkwardly located king. I leave the rest of the game without much comment, though it is interesting to play over.

41.♕f8† ♔h5 42.♕e7 ♕b6† 43.♔f3 ♕b3† 44.♔f2 ♖xe2†



45.♕xe2†

A nice variation suggested by GM Krasenkow is 45.♔xe2! h6 46.h3 ♕g3! (apparently the only winning method) 47.♕e5† g5 48.♕e8† ♔h4 49.♕xc6 ♕xf4! 50.♕xb7 ♔g3! and the queen endgame is won as the g2- and h3-pawns are lost.

45...♔h6 46.g4 ♘d8 47.♕e7 ♘e6 48.♕h4† ♔g7 49.♕e7† ♔g8 50.♕e8† ♘f8 51.♕xc6 ♕e6 52.♕f3 ♘d7 53.h3 ♔f7 54.♕c3 ♕d5 55.♔g3 ♘c5 56.♔h4 h6 57.♕h8 g5† 58.fxg5 hxg5† 59.♔h5 ♕e4 60.♔xg5 ♘e6†

White resigned in view of the forced checkmate after: 61.♔h4 ♕e1† 62.♔h5 ♘g7† 63.♔g5 ♕d2† 64.♔h4 ♕f2† 65.♔g5 ♕f6#

0–1

Final remarks

1. The break ...e6-e5 is desirable in order to disrupt White's centre.
2. In addition, if White's pieces are underdeveloped, then this break can help Black play for an advantage by penetrating down the d-file.

Wang Yue – Magnus Carlsen

Medias 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White's d4-pawn could become vulnerable, and how Black makes use of it.

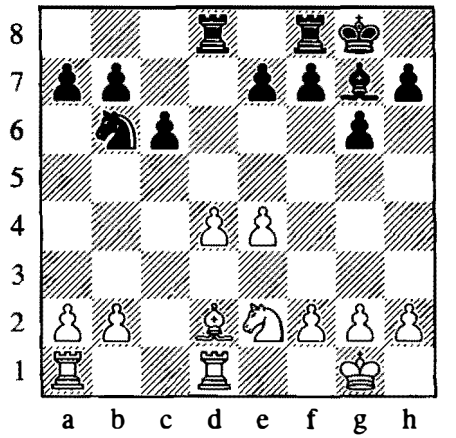
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♗d2 ♗g7 6.e4 ♘b6 7.♗e3

An opening book would say this is really a Grünfeld position and this is true. However, from a positional standpoint, the structure and character of this game more closely resembles the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

7...0–0 8.♗b5

This standard opening move prevents Black from developing a knight to c6.

8...♗e6 9.♘ge2 c6 10.♗d3 ♘c4 11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.0–0 ♘d7 13.♕d2 ♕a5 14.♖fd1 ♖ad8 15.♗h6 ♗xe2 16.♘xe2 ♕xd2 17.♗xd2 ♘b6



We have reached the position we are truly interested in. The reader should notice how well Black has conducted this game. He managed to trade two minor pieces and the queen, solving the space problem, and now is ready to exert pressure against the d4-pawn. White's pieces are poorly located to defend the vulnerable centre.

18.♗c3

Other bishop moves only further risk the d4-pawn. If 18.e5, blocking the bishop on g7 to protect the d4-pawn, then after 18...f6!? 19.f4 ♘c4 20.♗c3 ♖d7∓ Black enjoys a pleasant positional edge.

The try 18.♗e3 is met by: 18...♘c4! 19.b3 ♘xe3 20.fxe3 e5!∓

18...♖d7

Preparing to double rooks in order to increase the pressure against d4.

A strong alternative was:
18...♘a4!? 19.♖d2 f5! 20.exf5 (Supporting the centre with 20.f3 is not possible due to 20...♗h6! 21.♖d3 e5!∓ creating strong threats, for example 22.♖ad1? [or 22.d5 cxd5 23.exd5 ♖fe8∓] 22...fxe4 23.fxe4 exd4 24.♘xd4 ♘c5 25.♖h3 ♗g7 winning material by force.) 20...♖xf5 21.♖ad1 ♖fd5∓ With definite pressure.

19.b3 f5!?

Challenging White's central control.

Another option was 19...♖fd8 pressuring the d4-pawn and now: 20.♖d2 ♘a8! A key manoeuvre. 21.♖ad1 ♘c7 (heading to either b5 or e6) 22.f3 f5!?∓ gives better chances to Black due to White's vulnerable central pawns.

20.f3

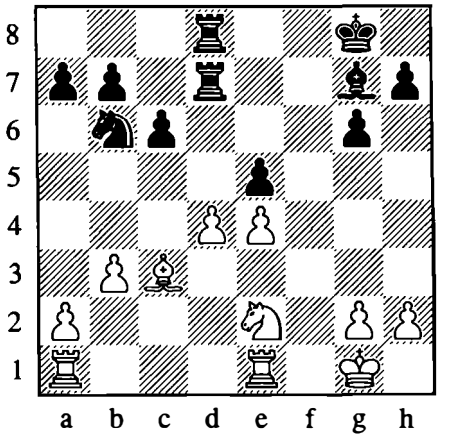
Maintaining control of the d5-square; if 20.exf5 ♖xf5 White's centre is quite vulnerable, for example: 21.♖ac1 ♘d5 22.♗d2 ♖f8 23.g3 ♘c7 24.♗e3 ♖fd8∓ followed by ...♘b5 and potential breaks ...e7-e5 or ...c6-c5.

20...♖fd8 21.♖e1 fxe4

Now it is too late for 21...♘a8 hoping for ...♘c7-b5, because of 22.d5! ♗xc3 23.♘xc3 cxd5 24.♘xd5 with a level game.

22.fxe4 e5!

This is a break to be remembered. It forces the creation of an isolated e-pawn.



23.dxe5 ♖d3

Probably not the most precise. Slightly better was 23...♖e8!? 24.♖ad1 ♗xe5 25.♗xe5 ♖xe5 26.♘c3 ♔f7∓ when the e4-pawn is somewhat vulnerable.

24.g3?

A severe imprecision allowing Black to take the lead.

White could have held on to approximate equality after 24.♗b2 ♖e8 25.♖ad1 ♖e3 26.♘c1 ♖xe1† 27.♖xe1 ♘d7 28.♘d3 ♘xe5.

24...♘d7! 25.e6?!

Worsening the situation. A better continuation was 25.♗a5 ♘xe5 (or 25...b6 26.♘f4!) 26.♗xd8 ♘f3† 27.♔f2 ♘xe1 28.♖xe1 ♖xd8∓ though Black has good chances to fight for the win.

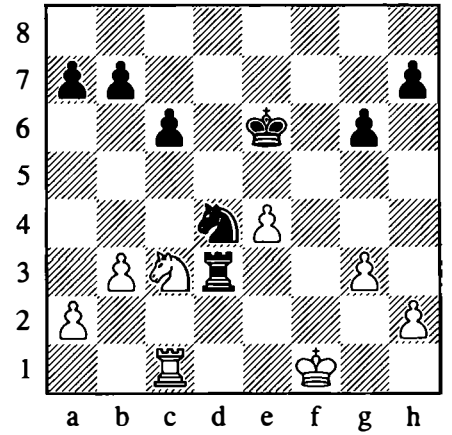
25...♗xc3 26.♘xc3 ♘e5!∓

Now Black has obtained the kind of position one dreams of when playing ...f7-f5 followed by ...e7-e5. The e4-pawn is a clear weakness and Black will follow with ...♔f8-e7xe6 with a clear advantage.

27.♖ed1 ♔f8 28.♖ac1

28.♖xd3 ♖xd3 29.♘a4 does not help because of the simple: 29...♔e7 30.♘c5 ♖d2! 31.♘xb7 ♘f3† 32.♔f1 ♘xh2† 33.♔e1 ♘f3† 34.♔f1 ♔xe6∓

28...♔e7 29.♖xd3 ♖xd3 30.♖c2 ♘f3† 31.♔f1 ♘d4 32.♖c1 ♔xe6



White's position is desperate despite having equal material, because of the chronic weakness of the e4-pawn.

33.♖d1

Other options are worse; another try was 33.♔e1 ♔e5 34.♘d1 b6 (but not 34...♔xe4?? 35.♘f2†) 35.♖c4 c5 36.♘f2 ♖f3∓ and Black will progress slowly with ...h7-h5, ...g6-g5-g4, ...a7-a5, etc. White's position is hopeless.

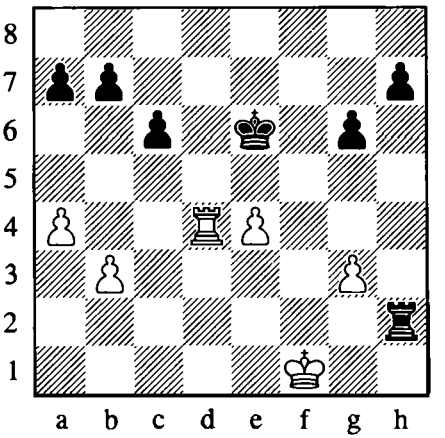
33...♖xc3

An interesting option was 33...♖f3†!? 34.♔e1 (or 34.♔g2 ♖xc3 35.♖xd4 ♖c2† 36.♔f3 ♖xa2–+) 34...♔e5 35.♘e2 c5 36.♘xd4 cxd4∓ with a practically winning position.

34.♖xd4 ♖c2 35.a4

As Rogozenko suggests, the try 35.♖a4 does not help because after 35...a6 36.h4 ♔e5 White is in zugzwang and lost. For example 37.♔e1 ♖g2 or 37.♔g1 ♖e2 or, worst of all, 37.♖b4? b5 followed by ...c6-c5.

35...♖xh2



Black has a healthy extra pawn, and won this endgame without difficulty after:

36.a5 ♖h5 37.b4 ♖h2 38.a6 b5!

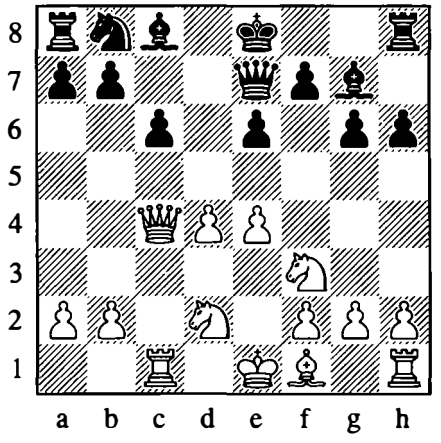
Keeping the queenside pawns healthy.

39.e5 ♖a2 40.♖d6† ♔xe5 41.♖xc6 ♔f5 42.♖c7 ♖xa6 43.♖xh7 ♔g4 44.♔f2 ♖a2† 45.♔e3 g5 46.♖g7 ♖b2 47.♖xa7 ♔xg3
0–1

Final remarks

1. In the endgame, once e3-e4 has been played, the d4-pawn can become an object of attack.
2. The reader should remember that pressuring the d4-pawn will not always work. It works particularly well in this game because Black's bishop was on g7, and because White's pieces were poorly placed to begin with.
3. The break ...f7-f5 is an important move in Black's strategy, undermining the control of the d5-square.
4. The idea of ...f7-f5, followed by trading pawns on e4 and playing ...e7-e5, is thematic and strategically sound, as it turns the e4-pawn into a permanent weakness.

I decided to finish this chapter with a short fragment from the game **Andreikin – Kramnik**, Dortmund 2013.



White continued with:

11.e5!

Fixing the centre and preventing Black from eventually releasing his position with ...e6-e5. It should be noted that the advance e4-e5 has some crucial differences compared with the advance c4-c5 we studied in the previous chapter. Most importantly:

1. White gains direct chances for an attack since the e5-pawn controls the important f6-square.
2. Black is far more likely to achieve ...c6-c5 in this position than he was to achieve ...e6-e5 in the previous chapter.
3. In the previous chapter Black's light-squared bishop was completely restricted. Since ...c6-c5 is not exactly impossible, Black's bishop can find some activity from the b7-square.
4. There exists a possibility to break White's centre with ...f7-f6 since White cannot easily play f2-f4. In contrast, in the previous chapter White could almost always respond with b2-b4 against Black's ...b7-b6.

Similarly to the previous chapter, the d4-pawn is not really vulnerable, and Black is rather unlikely to gain anything from placing a knight on the d5-square.

If White plays 11.♗d3 ♘d7 12.0–0? (it was not too late for 12.e5!) 12...e5! Black equalizes completely.

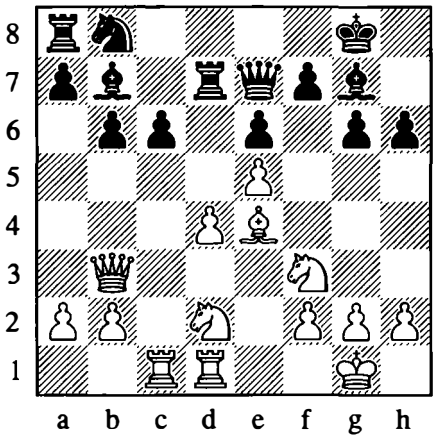
11...0–0 12.♗d3 b6

Black typically would attempt the break with 12...f6? but here it is impossible since the g6-pawn falls after 13.♗xg6.

13.0–0 ♖d8

If 13...♗a6 14.♕b3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♖d8 16.♕e4± White is in control, as Black cannot develop his knight.

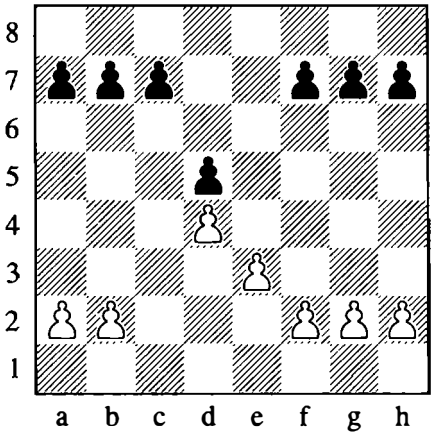
14.♕b3 ♗b7 15.♗e4 ♖d7 16.♖fd1±



This is a position to remember: White is in complete control of the game and the weakness of the backward d4-pawn is only symbolic. Black continued with 16...c5 accepting a permanently weak c-pawn, which led him to lose. The rest of the game is irrelevant to our study, but the reader should carefully examine the differences between the e4-e5 and c4-c5 advances, contrasting this chapter and the previous one.

Chapter 5

The Carlsbad Formation



The Carlsbad, also known as the Orthodox Exchange formation, is a very well-known and thoroughly studied pawn structure. In fact, it is one of the few pawn structures which has received the attention other structures in this book deserve. The Carlsbad can be reached from many different move orders, and in some cases with reversed colours, such as in the Caro-Kann after: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5. Despite this fact, every game presented in this chapter will have White and Black playing the roles as presented in the diagram at the top of this page.

White's plans

This position offers two main lines of attack for White:

1. Pursuing the so-called minority attack with b2-b4-b5 in order to create a queenside weakness.
2. Pushing f2-f3 and e3-e4 (or sometimes e3-e4 directly) gaining central space and creating tension.

Given any position, it is likely that only one of these plans will work well. This will depend on how the pieces are arranged, and how Black's queenside structure is set up. For example, the character of the game can change dramatically if Black's pawns are set up as a7-b6-c7 instead of the more typical a6-b7-c6. In addition, White's queenside plan is less likely to work if the light-squared bishop has been developed on g2.

Black's plans

1. The main plan is to place a knight on e4 and to create a kingside attack, but this is not always possible. For example, White might choose a set-up in which f2-f3 is included
2. The most common auxiliary plan is to play ...b7-b6 and ...c6-c5 in order to transpose into a hanging pawns position. Or sometimes just ...c6-c5 is played directly, hence dxc5 transposes into an isolani.
3. An important though far less common plan is to play ...b7-b5 once White has played b2-b4, in order to obtain a firm outpost for a knight placed on c4. This plan is less common because ...b7-b5 also creates a weakness – a backward c6-pawn, which could cause this plan to backfire.

The first game in this chapter illustrates how necessary it is for White to place his dark-squared bishop outside the pawn chain (say on g5 instead of d2). The second game is an ideal execution of White's minority attack, while the third is an example of Black neutralizing this plan after some precise moves. The fourth game in the

chapter explains how White must react if Black's queenside is arranged as a7-b6-c7. The last two games show the consequences of White carrying out the e3-e4 break first successfully and then unsuccessfully.

Nicolai Getz – Simen Agdestein

Fagernes 2013

Learning objectives:

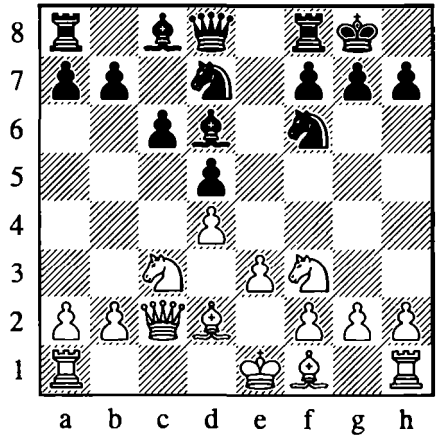
1. It is bad for White to have a Carlsbad structure with the dark-squared bishop inside the chain.
2. This game illustrates how Black will easily gain control of the e4-square and later develop a kingside attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 c6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♕c2 ♗d6 7.♗d2 0–0 8.cxd5?!

This natural-looking move is actually a serious opening imprecision that has been played more than 30 times – with poor results. More common is 8.♗d3.

8...exd5!

Of course Black retakes with ...exd5 heading into a Carlsbad structure under favourable circumstances. The reader should remember the reason: White's dark-squared bishop is inside the pawn chain and, compared to a powerful bishop on f4 or g5, it is rather useless on d2.



9.♗d3

The very same Agdestein (Black in the current game) went for this line 20 years before, though he continued 9.0–0–0 ♖e8 10.♗d3 c5! when Black has a preferable position due to his strong initiative on the queenside, as in the game Agdestein – Shirov, Gausdal 1992.

9...♖e8 10.0–0

Turning the position into an isolated-queen-pawn type with 10.e4? fails to 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♘f6 and White loses a piece.

10...♕e7

Preventing White's liberation with e3-e4.

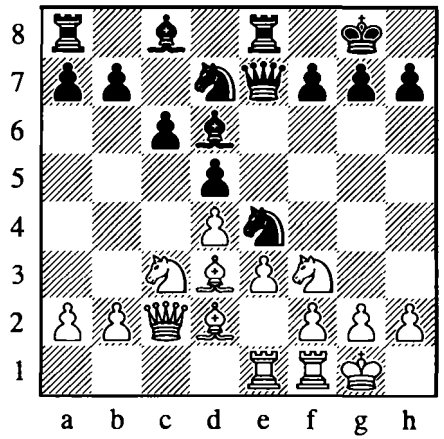
Instead 10...♘f8?! allows 11.e4! dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4 with level chances in a typical isolani position.

11.♖ae1

Trapping the rook on f1 only makes matters worse, but there are no good suggestions for White anyway. Attempting to develop the standard queenside plan with b2-b4-b5 is too slow, for example 11.a3 ♘e4 12.b4 ♘df6 13.h3 (or 13.b5 ♗g4! when Black is already creating threats) 13...♗f5∓ when Black has comfortable control of the e4-square and good potential for a kingside attack, while White has little to say on the queenside.

11...♘e4∓

Black's advantage is indisputable.



12.♗c1 ♘df6 13.h3 ♗d7

The reader should note how little White has to hope for.

14.♘d2

Attempting to remove Black's knight from e4.

It does not help to play 14.♗xe4?! as it gives Black a pleasant choice between 14...♘xe4 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♘d2 ♕h4∓ threatening ...♗xh3 with a very dangerous attack, or 14...dxe4!? 15.♘d2 ♖ac8∓ followed by ...c6-c5 and potentially ...♖xc5-g5.

14...♖ac8!

A very healthy and powerful move, preparing the idea ...c6-c5 to incorporate Black's rook into the attack.

Another option was 14...♗b8 aiming to play 15...♕d6 with threats along b8-h2, but probably Black does not want to trap his rook on a8.

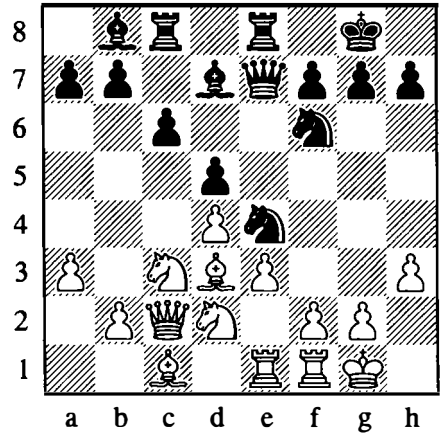
15.a3

The value of Black's 14th move is illustrated in the variation 15.♘dxe4? dxe4 16.♗c4 b5 17.♗b3 c5! and if 18.dxc5 ♖xc5 followed by ...b5-b4 winning a piece, or ...♖g5 with a crushing attack.

15...♗b8

Preparing ...♕d6 to threaten ...♕h2#.

The try 15...c5? fails to 16.♘xd5! ♘xd5 17.♘xe4.



16.♘dxe4?

The decisive mistake: White underestimates Black's attacking chances.

Preferable was 16.b4 ♕d6 17.f4 ♗f5 (in order to trade light-squared bishops) 18.♗b2 ♘xd2 19.♕xd2 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3 ♘e4 21.♘xe4 ♖xe4∓ when Black can slowly improve his position, for example with ...f7-f5, ...♖ce8 and eventually ...g7-g5.

16...dxe4 17.♗c4 b5 18.♗a2 c5

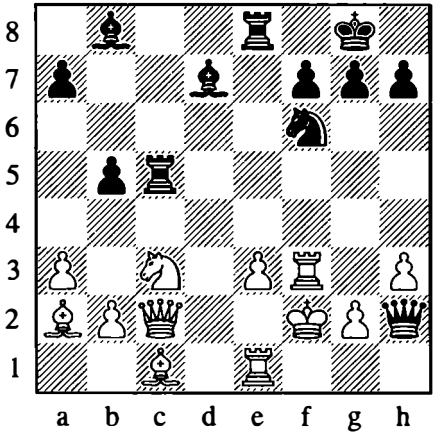
Bringing the rook into the game.

Another option was: 18...♕d6!? 19.f4 (or 19.g3 ♗xh3–+) 19...exf3 20.♖xf3 ♕h2† 21.♔f1 ♗g3–+ There is nothing better than giving up the exchange.

19.dxc5 ♕e5 20.f4 exf3 21.♖xf3 ♕h2† 22.♔f2

22.♔f1 ♗c6 23.e4 ♗g3 forces White to give up the exchange: 24.♖xg3 ♕xg3–+

22...♖xc5–+



White is simply defenceless against the multiple threats, such as .. ♗c6 or ...♘e4†.

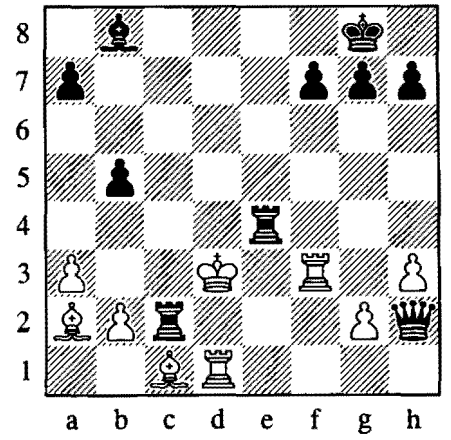
23.♖d1 ♗c6 24.e4 ♘xe4† 25.♕xe4

25.♘xe4 ♖xc2† and wins.

25...♗xe4 26.♘xe4 ♖c2† 27.♔e3 ♖xe4†!

28.♔d3

Also hopeless is 28.♔xe4 ♕e5† 29.♔d3 ♕e2† 30.♔d4 ♕xd1†.



28...♖cc4

0–1

Final remarks

1. Having his bishop locked inside the pawn chain sentenced White to an outright inferior position.
2. White's chances of counterplay were practically non-existent after 11...♘e4.
3. Black's move...♖ac8 was somewhat unexpected, but very important, as the break ...c6-c5 played a crucial role in many variations.

I hope this game leaves a strong impression on the reader. White's dark-squared bishop must be outside the pawn chain for White to have a chance in the Carlsbad structure.

Making a Caro-Kann analogy to this example, after the sequence **1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♗d3 ♘c6 5.c3** it would be absolutely incorrect to play **5...e6?** as it locks the bishop inside the pawn chain, allowing White to gain a powerful attack as Black did in the previous game.

Gilberto Milos – Marc Narciso Dublan

Mexico City 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White can carry out the standard minority attack in the Carlsbad, and how to attack the weaknesses once they are created.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.h3 0–0 9.♕c2 ♖e8 10.♘f3 ♘f8 11.♗f4

I would like to paraphrase something my former coach Bartlomiej Macieja said to me about a year before I wrote this book. He said, "People usually talk about good and bad bishops, but it should be quite clear that White's *bad bishop* is rather powerful on f4 or g5." That is, White's 'bad' bishop is actually an excellent piece as long as it is outside the pawn chain, unlike the previous game. Hence it makes sense for Black to trade it with:

11...♗d6 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.0–0

This is a standard set-up for this pawn structure; in fact there are over 100 games in my database with this exact position.

13...♗e6

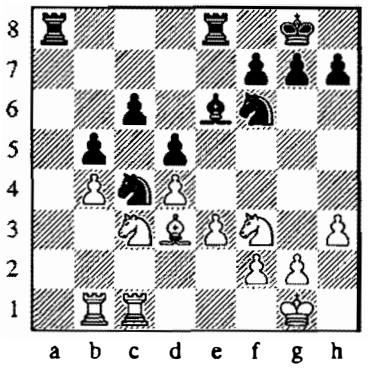
Another option was: 13...♕e7 14.♖ab1 ♘e4 15.b4 a6 16.a4 (If 16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.♘d2 ♗f5 chances are level. Black may continue with ...♘g6-h4 aiming for a kingside attack.) 16...♗f5 17.b5 ♘xc3 18.♕xc3 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 cxb5 20.axb5 a5 Black has a playable position, though the d5-pawn is a small weakness.

14.♖ab1 ♘6d7

Probably better was:

14...a5 15.a3 ♘8d7 16.♖fc1

Black is ready to meet 16.b4?! with 16...b5! when he achieves reasonable counterplay associated with ...♘b6-c4. White is unable to take advantage of the weakness of the c6-pawn: 17.♖fc1 ♘b6 18.♕b3 axb4 19.♕xb4 ♕xb4 20.axb4 ♘c4



With a level game.

16...h6 17.♘a4

White is getting ready to play b2-b4.

17...♘e4!

The right moment for this reaction.

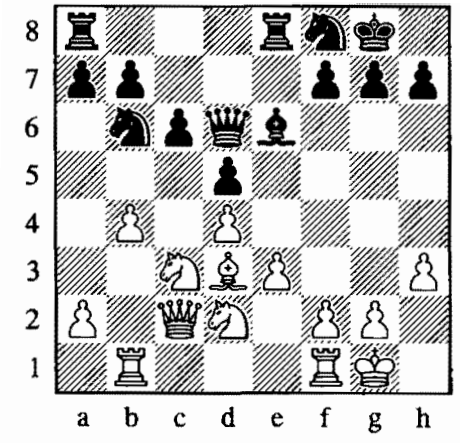
18.♘d2

It is not possible to grab the pawn with 18.♗xe4 dxe4 19.♕xe4? due to 19...♗b3 winning the knight.

18...♗f5 19.♗xe4 ♖xe4! 20.♘xe4 ♗xe4 21.♕d1 ♕g6 22.♕f1

Black has a comfortable position, and agreed to a draw in the game Krivoshey – Klovans, Germany 1997.

15.b4 ♘b6 16.♘d2



16...♖ad8?!

Black plays without a clear plan, and misses his chance to play the standard ...a7-a6 defensive move.

It was not too late for Black to play: 16...a6 17.a4 g6 (but not 17...♘c4?! 18.♗xc4 dxc4 19.b5!± as the c4-pawn is permanently weakened) 18.♖fc1!?± The b4-b5 break is coming sooner or later, but at least Black will only have to deal with one weakness – probably the c6-pawn – instead of two weaknesses as in the game. (It is premature to play 18.b5?! axb5 19.axb5 c5! 20.dxc5 ♕xc5 when Black has enough counterplay to compensate for the isolated queen pawn, because of the open a- and c-files, as well as the c4-square for one of Black's knights.)

17.♘e2!

White wants to prevent Black from responding ...c6-c5 against the break b4-b5.

An interesting alternative was 17.b5 c5 18.dxc5 ♕xc5 19.♘f3 ♖c8 20.♖bc1± where White enjoys a slightly favourable version of the isolani. As we studied in the game Vitiugov – Bologan from Chapter 1, the absence of Black's dark-squared bishop deprives him of useful counterplay. Compare this to the note after Black's 16th move, and see how in this case the a-file is now closed, limiting Black's options.

17...♗c8

Now it is too late for 17...a6 due to: 18.♘b3! ♕e7 (the tempting 18...♘c4? fails after 19.♘c5! ♕e7 [19...♘a3? is no help: 20.♕b2 ♘xb1 21.♘xb7 ♕c7 22.♘xd8 and wins] 20.♗xc4 dxc4 21.♘xe6 ♕xe6 22.♘f4 ♕e4 23.♕xc4± winning a pawn) 19.♘c5 ♗c8 20.a4± leaving Black unprepared to meet b4-b5.

18.b5

White achieves the b4-b5 break under optimal conditions, creating at least one serious weakness in Black's queenside.

18...cxb5 19.♖xb5

The d5-pawn is now very weak.

19...♗d7 20.♖a5 ♘c8

A better defence was 20...♖a8 21.♕c5 ♕xc5 22.dxc5 ♘c8 23.♖b1 ♗c6 24.♘d4 ♘e7± and Black seems to hold for a while.

But not 20...a6? 21.♖b1 followed by ♕b3, when Black's queenside is about to collapse.

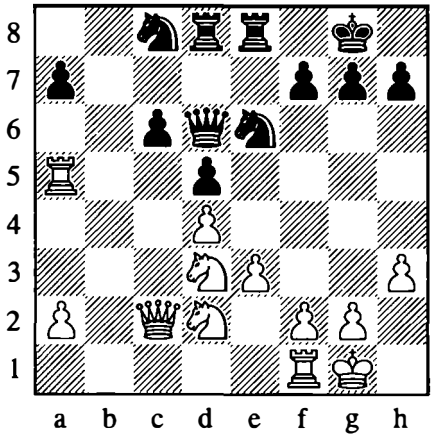
21.♘f4 ♗c6 22.♗b5!

Clarifying the position on the queenside; the positional threat is ♗xc6 forcing the creation of a very weak pawn on c6.

22...♘e6

It is no better to play: 22...♗xb5 23.♖xb5 ♘b6 24.a4 Threatening a4-a5 winning the d5-pawn. 24...a6 (or 24...♖c8 25.♕b3±) 25.♖b3± Now the b7-pawn becomes a serious target.

23.♗xc6 bxc6 24.♘d3±



This position deserves some comment. Since Black decided not to play ...a7-a6 earlier in the game, both the a2- and a7-pawns remain present. This plays a crucial role, as Black needs to worry about protecting both the a7- and c6-pawns.

24...♖d7 25.♖c1 ♖c7 26.♕c3 ♘b6 27.♘c5

To be followed by ♘a6-b4 in order to pressure the c6-pawn.

27...♕d8

Of course not 27...♘xc5?? 28.dxc5.

28.♘a6 ♖c8 29.♕a3 ♖e7 30.♘b4

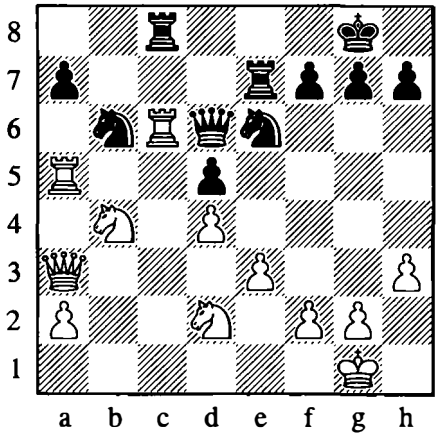
Note how both the a7-pawn and the c6-pawn are under attack; Black's defence has collapsed.

30...♕d6?!

A better defence was 30...♖ec7 31.♖xa7 c5 32.♖xc7 ♖xc7 33.dxc5 ♘xc5± though White has an extra pawn for no compensation.

31.♖xc6!+–

A nice tactical blow in a strategically winning position.



31...♖xc6 32.♘xc6 ♕xa3

Not 32...♕xc6?? 33.♕xe7 and White wins at once.

33.♖xa3 ♖c7 34.♘b4

White is a pawn up, while the d5- and a7-pawns remain serious weaknesses.

There is nothing wrong with 34.♘xa7, though White needs to calculate the consequences of 34...♖c1† 35.♔h2 ♖c2.

34...♔f8 35.♔f1 ♔e8 36.♖a5 ♘c4

Passive defence with 36...♖d7 does not enable the position to be held, for example: 37.♔e2 g6 (37...♔d8?! 38.♖xa7 winning a second pawn) 38.♔d3 ♘d8 39.♘b1 followed by ♘c3 winning easily.

37.♘xc4 dxc4

The passed pawn on c4 is simply another weakness in Black's camp.

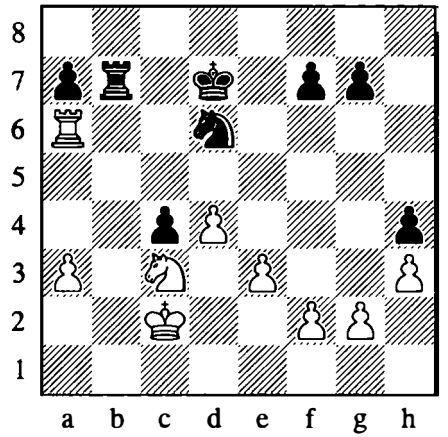
38.♔e2 ♖b7 39.a3 ♘c7 40.♔d2 ♘b5

41.♔c2 ♔d7

41...♘xa3† fails to help after 42.♖xa3 ♖xb4 43.♖xa7 as the c4-pawn is practically lost, say after ♖a2 and ♔c3.

42.♖a6 h5 43.♘d5 h4 44.♘c3 ♘d6

Or 44...♘xc3 45.♔xc3 ♖c7 46.e4 is winning.



45.e4

White has arranged his pieces in harmony and suppressed all counterplay; the rest is very simple.

45...f6 46.f3 ♘c8 47.♘a4 ♔e8 48.♖c6 ♘e7 49.♖xc4 ♘g6 50.♘c5 ♖c7 51.♔b3 ♘f4 52.♖c2 a5 53.♔c4 g5 54.d5 ♖c8 55.♔d4 ♖b8 56.e5 fxe5† 57.♔xe5 ♖b1 58.♘e6 ♘d3† 59.♔f6 ♔d7 60.♘xg5 ♖b3 61.♘f7 ♘e1 62.♖e2 ♘xg2 63.♘e5†

1–0

Final remarks

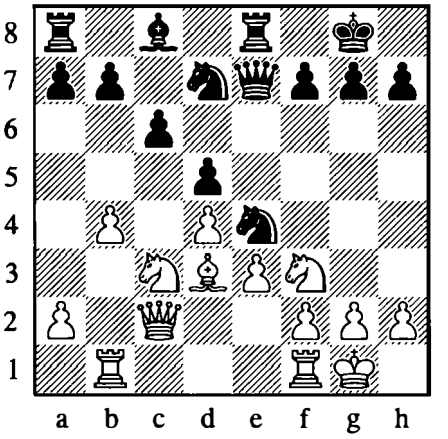
1. Black could have faced fewer problems if he had played ...a7-a6 at the right time. Then after a future b4-b5, Black would have had some chances to protect the weak c6-pawn.
2. The sequence of moves before White's tactical blow 31.♖xc6 would not have worked so easily for White if Black did not have a weak a7-pawn. Essentially this was not a tactical mistake, but the consequence of a prior positional mistake (not playing 14...a5, or not playing 15...a6 or 16...a6).

Al. Onischuk – Leinier Dominguez Perez

FIDE World Cup, Tromsø 2013

Learning objective: This game illustrates how Black may neutralize White's minority attack with a precise sequence of trades and manoeuvres.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♗b4† 4.♗d2 ♗xd2† 5.♕xd2 d5 6.♘c3 0–0 7.e3 ♕e7 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗d3 ♘bd7 10.0–0 c6 11.♕c2 ♖e8 12.♖ab1 ♘e4 13.b4



13...♘df6

The first new move of the game. Previously 13...g6 had been played, after which 14.b5 ♘xc3 15.♕xc3 c5 16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♘d4 ♗d7 18.♖fc1 gave White only a microscopic advantage in Khanukov – Kholmov, Arco 2001.

14.♘e5

The immediate 14.b5!? is met by 14...c5! 15.dxc5 ♘xc5 16.♘d4 ♗d7 17.♖fd1 ♖ac8 when the weak b5-pawn and the outpost on e4 give Black good compensation for the isolani.

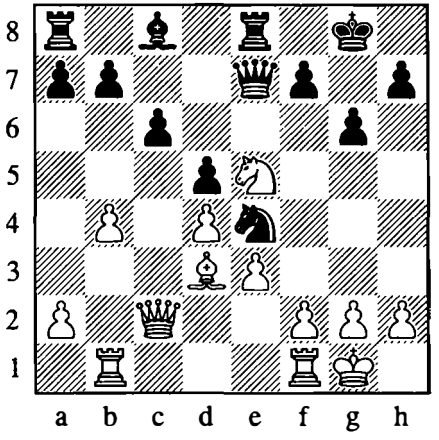
14...♘xc3 15.♕xc3 ♘e4 16.♕c2

The alternative 16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.b5 does not give White anything after 17...c5!= since the c5-pawn cannot be captured: 18.dxc5?? ♕xe5–+

16...g6!

An important move, with the idea of ...♗f5 reinforcing Black's control of the e4-square.

Instead 16...♘f6?! would allow White to weaken Black's queenside with 17.♖fc1 (but not the premature 17.b5? c5!= again, since White's knight on e5 needs protection) 17...a6 18.a4± followed by the unstoppable b4-b5.



17.♖fc1

White cannot take the pawn with 17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♕xe4? because 18...f6 wins a piece.

17...♗f5 18.♖b3

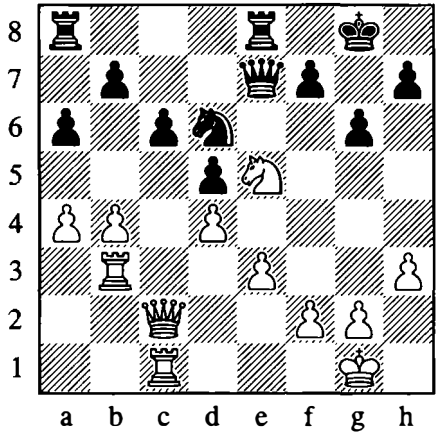
Again it is impossible to play 18.b5? because 18...c5!∓ followed by ...c5-c4 enables Black to take the lead.

The alternative 18.♘f3 with the idea of b4-b5 is refuted tactically by: 18...a5! 19.b5 (or 19.bxa5 ♖xa5∓) 19...cxb5 White's queen on c2 experiences problems, for example: 20.♗xb5 (Even worse is: 20.♖xb5? ♖ac8 21.♕b2 ♘xf2!! 22.♗xf5 ♘d3! The key move. 23.♗xd3 ♕xe3† 24.♔h1 ♖xc1†–+) 20...♖ec8 21.♕b3 ♘c3! 22.♖a1 (22.♖xc3? ♖xc3 23.♕xc3 ♗xb1–+) 22...♕b4! And Black suddenly takes the lead on the queenside.

18...a6 19.a4 ♘d6 20.♗xf5 ♘xf5 21.h3

Now a little bit of context: this game took place during the FIDE World Cup (a knockout event) where players confront each other twice to decide who advances to the next round. Having lost the first encounter, Onischuk absolutely needed a win in order to stay in the match, but to my surprise (I was following the game online) after playing 21.h3 he offered a draw, thus being eliminated! I thought about this for quite some time and came to agree with his decision. The truth is that Black has arranged his pieces so well that once again 21.b5? fails due to 21...axb5 22.axb5 c5!∓ since the c5-pawn cannot be captured by 23.♕xc5? because of 23...♕xc5 when Black wins after either 24.dxc5 ♖xe5 or 24.♖xc5? ♖a1†.

21...♘d6!



Preventing b4-b5, White has nothing useful to do, meanwhile Black can speculate with potential kingside threats if he wishes, or he may just wait. As an example I offer the following variation:

22.♘d3

Hoping to gain something with the slow manoeuvre ♘b2-d1-c3 followed by b4-b5.

22...♔g7 23.♘b2 ♔g8

Black is simply waiting for White to do something more concrete.

24.♘d1?!

Allowing Black a nice reaction:

24...f5!

A well-timed decision.

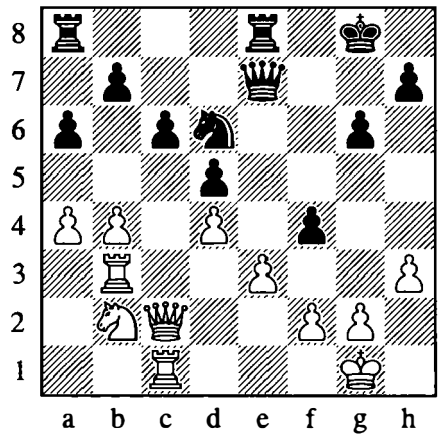
25.♘b2

Aiming towards ♘d3-e5 now that the e5-square lacks protection, but Black has a powerful reply.

If White instead proceeds with his b4-b5 idea with 25.♘c3 he meets the strong 25...f4! 26.exf4 ♕f6 27.♖d1 ♕xf4∓ where Black's position is preferable due to the vulnerability of the d4-pawn.

If 25.g3 Black may just accept the challenge with 25...g5!?∓ or choose the alternative: 25...h5!? 26.h4 g5∓

25...f4!



26.exf4 ♕f6 27.♖d1 ♘f5 28.♖bd3 ♖e4∓

White is in trouble.

Final remarks

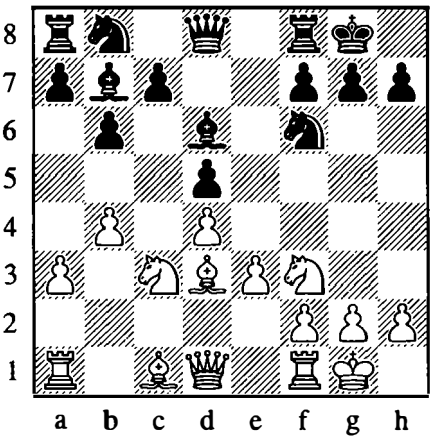
1. What is important to take from this example is that White's minority attack does not always work. If Black knows exactly how to react, he can perfectly well prevent the b4-b5 break.
2. In particular, playing ...a7-a6 is necessary and the idea ...♘e4-d6 covering the b5-square, should not be forgotten.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Ildar Khairullin

Aix-les-Bains 2011

Learning objective: This game explains how White may proceed with a queenside attack if Black's queenside pawns are arranged as a7-b6-c7 instead of the typical a7-b7-c6.

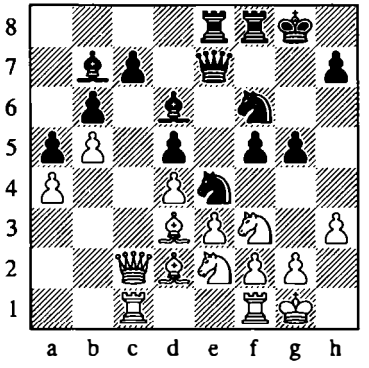
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3 b6 5.e3 ♗b7 6.♗d3 0–0 7.0–0 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.a3 ♗d6 10.b4



Everything is being played according to modern theory; in fact there are over 250 games with this position. One should pay close attention to Black's pawn structure on the queenside. The most typical Carlsbad structure has pawns on a6-b7-c6-d5, which makes the b4-b5 break quite powerful. In this case, it might seem that White has little to hope for since b4-b5 does not create any weak pawns, but this is not quite the case. White's plan is to first gain some space on the queenside with b4-b5 and a3-a4, weakening the c6-square and "isolating" the d5-pawn, and then either play ♗a3xd6 in order to weaken the c7-pawn, or blow up the centre with e3-e4. In both cases, Black's counterplay is associated with placing a knight on e4 and then creating a kingside attack, possibly through ...f7-f5 and ...g6-g5, as illustrated in the note to Black's 10th move.

10...a6

An alternative was: 10...a5 11.b5 ♘bd7 12.♗d2?! (instead I would have recommended 12.♕b3 followed by a3-a4 and ♗a3 trading Black's dark-squared bishop to weaken the c7-pawn) 12...♘e4 A good decision; it is crucial for Black to gain control of the e4-square, not only to prevent an eventual e3-e4 break, but also to gain attacking prospects on the kingside. 13.a4 ♕e7 14.h3 f5 Reinforcing the knight on e4 and increasing the attacking chances against White's monarch. 15.♕c2 ♘df6 16.♖ac1 ♖ae8 17.♘e2 g5



Black obtained a dangerous attack in Malaniuk – Annageldyev, Alushta 2007.

11.♕b3 ♕e7 12.♖b1 ♘bd7 13.a4 ♖fb8?!

The rook is rather useless on this square.

Preferable was: 13...♖fe8 14.b5 axb5 (worse is 14...a5 15.♖a1 ♖ad8 16.♗a3 as trading dark-squared bishops weakens the c7-pawn: 16...h6 17.♗xd6 cxd6 [or 17...♕xd6 18.♖ac1±] 18.♖ac1± when White has a pleasant position, as in Ionov – Shaposhnikov, St Petersburg 2003) 15.axb5 ♘e4! When White must probably accept the challenge and sacrifice an exchange with: 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♕xd5 ♘c3 18.♕b3 ♘xb1 19.♕xb1 (or 19.♗xb1 ♘f6 20.e4 ♘xe4 21.♖e1 ♕e6 22.♕xe6 ♖xe6 23.♗xe4 ♖a1∞ when Black will regain the two bishops for a rook) 19...♘f6 Controlling the e4-square, with an approximately level game.

14.b5 axb5 15.axb5 g6

The typical 15...♘e4?! does not work well due to 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♕xd5 ♘c3 18.♕c4 ♘xb1 19.♗xb1± with very good compensation for the exchange, as Black cannot prevent the advance e3-e4 with: 19...♘f6?! 20.e4! ♘xe4? 21.♖e1+– This variation illustrates why Black's rook on e8 was important.

16.h3 h6

Again, the desired 16...♘e4 is met by 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♘c3 19.♕c6 ♘xb1 20.♗xb1± followed by e3-e4.

17.♖e1

Beginning to prepare the break e3-e4.

17...♖a7

Once again: 17...♘e4 18.♘xd5!±

18.♗b2

An interesting alternative was 18.♗xg6!? fxg6 19.e4 with a dangerous initiative, for example 19...♘h5 20.e5 ♗a3 21.♗xh6 ♘f8 (21...♕e6? 22.♘g5!+– followed by ♘xd5) 22.g4 ♘g7 23.♘xd5 with an attack.

18...♕e6

Protecting d5, hoping for the desired 19...♘e4.

19.♘d2

Reinforcing the control of e4, White is almost ready to break in the centre.

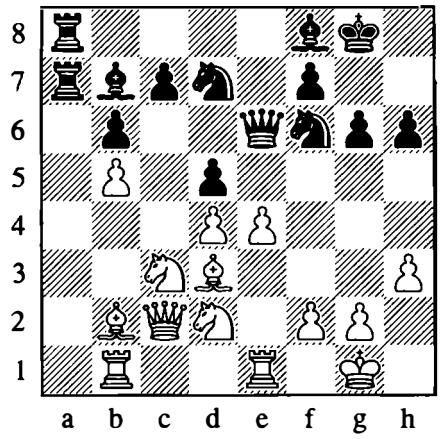
19...♖ba8

Note how ineffective Black's play is on the queenside, as after so many moves there is still no semblance of a threat.

Unfortunately for Black 19...♘e4? simply loses a pawn after 20.♘cxe4 dxe4 21.♕xe6 fxe6 22.♘xe4.

20.♕c2 ♗f8 21.e4!±

The desired break at the right time. White gains a very powerful initiative in the centre, and Black is unable to deal with it.



21...dxe4

It was preferable to simply give up a pawn with 21...♕e7 22.exd5 (or 22.e5!?±) 22...♕d8 23.♗c4± though Black still needs to be careful with tactical shots, such as d5-d6 threatening ♕xg6.

22.♘dxe4 ♗xe4

22...♘xe4 is no improvement: 23.d5! ♕e7 (or 23...♗xd5 24.♘xd5 ♕xd5 25.♗xe4 ♕xb5 when White does not bother with ♗xa8, but instead 26.♗xg6!+–) 24.♘xe4 (threatening ♘f6) 24...♕d8 25.♕c3 f6 26.♗c2 followed by ♕g3 with a decisive attack.

23.♘xe4 ♗g7

The alternative 23...♘xe4 is a nice illustration of White's positional dominance; after 24.♗xe4 ♖e8 25.♖e3! White's advantage does not rely on a specific tactical shot, but rather on his great piece coordination, and Black's inability to protect the back rank, as illustrated by the variation: 25...♕d6 26.♖be1 ♗g7 27.♕c4 ♖f8 28.♗c2 ♘f6 (28...♖aa8 29.♖e6!+–) 29.♗b3 ♖aa8 30.♖e7+–

24.♗c4 ♕f5 25.g4!

An unlikely yet highly effective resource, taking advantage of the awkward location of Black's queen.

The more standard 25.♖e3!? should also be winning.

25...♕f3

Instead 25...♕f4? loses to 26.♗c1 ♕f3 27.♖b3 and the queen is trapped.

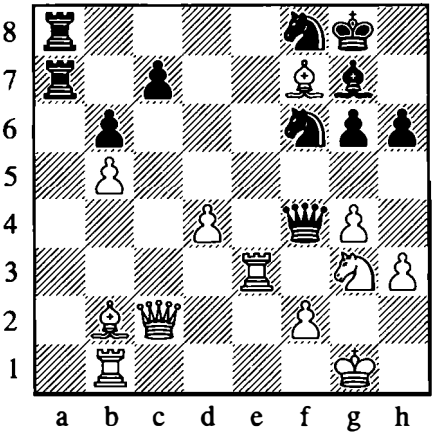
There is nothing to hope for after 25...♘xg4 26.hxg4 ♕xg4† 27.♘g3.

26.♖e3 ♕f4 27.♘g3

Threatening ♕xg6.

27...♘f8 28.♗xf7†!

A nice blow! The attack is overwhelming and White finished off the game with ease.



28...♔h7

The bishop is immune, because of 28...♔xf7? 29.♕b3† ♘e6 30.♖xe6 ♔f8 31.♖be1 followed by ♖e7, and White wins.

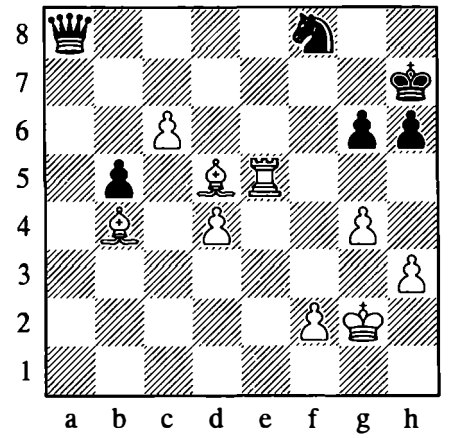
29.♗b3 ♖d8 30.♖be1 ♖d7 31.♖e5 ♖a8 32.♕c4 ♖ad8 33.♖1e4! ♕d2

Not 33...♘xe4?? 34.♕g8#.

34.♗c3 ♕c1† 35.♔g2 ♘d5 36.♘e2 ♕a3 37.♘f4 ♗xe5 38.♘xd5 ♖xd5 39.♖xe5 c6

Again, not 39...♖xe5?? 40.♕g8#.

40.♗b4 ♕a8 41.bxc6 b5 42.♕xd5 ♖xd5 43.♗xd5



Black resigns. The final position is quite picturesque. The strong c6-pawn, together with White's bishops, makes the position impossible to defend, for example: 43...♕d8 44.c7 ♕xc7 45.♖e7†

1–0

Final remarks

1. Whenever Black arranges his pawns as in the game, with a7-b6-c7, White must carefully analyze whether he will be able to dispute Black's control of the e4-square. If that is not the case, something is likely to go wrong.
2. If White can dispute the e4-square, then the plan b4-b5 followed by an eventual e3-e4 is very powerful, as it opens many lines for attack. Positionally, it also makes sense, as Black's backward c7-pawn and the c6-square may become vulnerable after e3-e4, especially if light-squared bishops are traded on e4.
3. Finally, Black had nothing to hope for down the a-file or on the queenside for that matter. Hence Black's 13th move proved to be an utter waste of time.

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2013

Learning objective: This game shows how White can successfully carry out the central break e3-e4.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♘ge2 d5 6.a3 ♗e7 7.cxd5 ♘xd5

7...exd5 is analyzed in the next game.

8.♗d2 ♘d7 9.g3 b6 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♗g2 ♗b7

The game Getz – Agdestein clearly illustrated how White's bishop is often poorly placed on d2 in this structure. Did Carlsen miss this concept? Of course not!

12.♗b4!

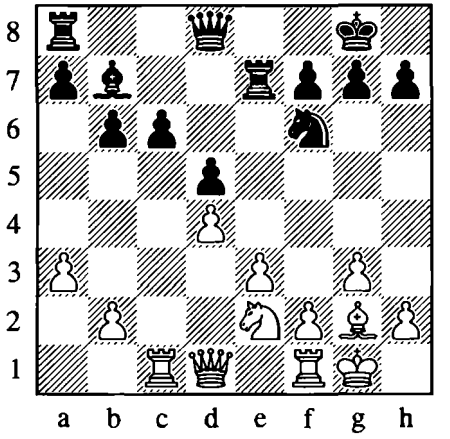
Finding an unusual route to make use of this bishop.

12...♘f6

If 12...c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♗c3 White has a slightly favourable version of the hanging pawns structure, as he has already traded one minor piece and his bishop on g2 puts pressure on the d5-pawn.

Dubious is 12...♗xb4†?! 13.axb4 ♕e7 14.♕b3 ♘f6 15.0–0± followed by ♖fc1 when White can exert pressure down the a- and c-files.

13.0–0 ♖e8 14.♖c1 c6 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7



The dark-squared bishops are off the board and White has a small advantage since the c6-pawn is already a weakness due to the advance ...b7-b6.

16.♖e1

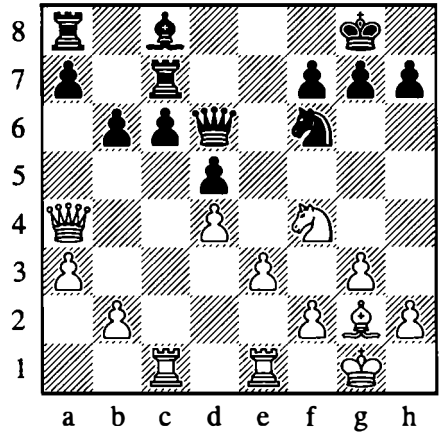
The reader should pay close attention to this move, as it is the beginning of a new plan in our toolbox.

The plan 16.b4?! is not as powerful since Black will respond to an eventual b4-b5 with ...cxb5 as the d5-pawn is well protected.

16...♕d6 17.♘f4 ♗c8

Transposing into a hanging pawns structure with 17...c5 18.dxc5 bxc5 puts Black under definite pressure after: 19.♕c2 ♖c8 20.♖ed1±

18.♕a4 ♖c7



19.f3!

Excellent; Carlsen chooses the perfect occasion to execute the typical plan e3-e4.

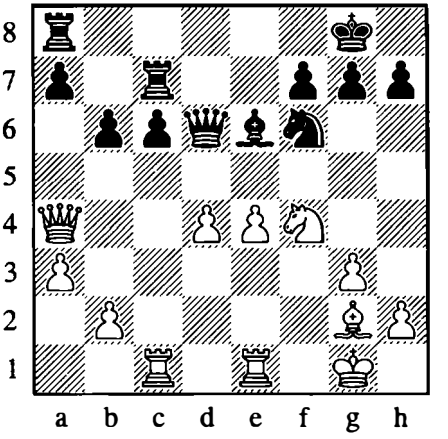
19...♗e6

The try 19...c5 is met by 20.e4! posing great problems since after 20...dxe4? (or 20...♗e6 21.dxc5 ♖xc5 22.♖cd1±) 21.fxe4+– the threat e4-e5 is even stronger, as there is a discovered attack on the a8-rook as well.

20.e4 dxe4?

Underestimating White's tactical resources. A better defence was 20...♕d7 21.♘xe6 (or 21.e5 c5 22.♕xd7 ♘xd7 23.♘e2±) 21...♕xe6 22.e5 ♘e8 23.♖c3± when White enjoys a pleasant advantage in a flexible position.

21.fxe4



Note how the influence of White's bishop on g2 has been enhanced by the plan f2-f3 and e3-e4. Black's position is uncomfortable due to multiple threats, such as e4-e5 winning a piece.

21...♕d7

If 21...b5 22.♕b4! ♕xb4 23.axb4 Black is in severe trouble. For example, 23...♖ac8 24.♖c3 ♗g4 25.e5 ♘e8 26.♖ec1 and Black's position falls apart.

22.d5!

A nice tactical blow, breaking Black's defence.

22...cxd5 23.♕xd7 ♖xd7 24.♘xe6 fxe6 25.♗h3!

The key move; Black cannot avoid losing a pawn.

25...♔h8

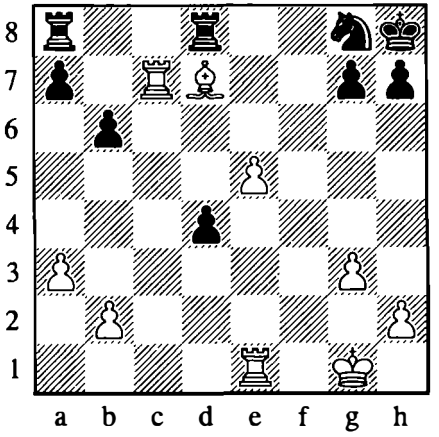
Another option was: 25...♖e8 26.exd5 ♖dd8! (inaccurate is 26...♔h8?! 27.♖xe6!) 27.♗xe6† ♔h8 28.♖ed1± White has a full extra pawn, but Black survives a little longer.

Worse is 25...♖e7?! 26.exd5.

26.e5 ♘g8 27.♗xe6 ♖dd8?!

Making the win easier. Instead 27...♖e7 28.♗xd5 ♖d8 allows Black to resist longer: 29.♗b3!?±

28.♖c7 d4 29.♗d7!+–



Black resigns in view of ♖d1 followed by ♖xd4.

1–0

Final remarks

1. White's move 12.♗b4 should be remembered. Carlsen understood the dark-squared bishop was useless inside the pawn chain as we learned earlier, so he found an unusual way to trade it.
2. The e3-e4 break is particularly strong with a bishop on g2. Most importantly, this break is even stronger if Black has played ...b7-b6 weakening the c6-pawn.
3. Black's capture 20...dxe4 is illogical, as it clears the way for the bishop on g2. After this mistake Black's position became extremely fragile, causing an early collapse.

Yuriy Kuzubov – Zahar Efimenko

Kiev 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This is an example of how Black may neutralize White's attempt to break with e3-e4.
2. After the break e3-e4 is carried out under unfavourable circumstances, the game turns into a bad version of a white isolani, which Black wins convincingly.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♘ge2 d5 6.a3 ♗e7 7.cxd5 exd5 8.g3 ♘bd7 9.♗g2 ♘b6 10.♕c2 a5

When followed by ...a5-a4 this is generally a good idea to gain some critical squares on the queenside.

11.0–0 ♖e8 12.♗d2

An alternative was 12.b3 ♗f8 13.♖d1 g6 (maybe better is 13...♗g4 14.f3 ♗d7 followed by ...c7-c5 with counterplay) 14.f3 ♗g7 15.e4 dxe4 16.fxe4 c6 17.a4± when White achieves comfortable control of the centre, as in the game M. Gurevich – Polaczek, Philadelphia 1989.

12...a4 13.♖ae1 ♗d7

Placing the bishop on d7 is only a temporary necessity, and it can be followed by ...♕c8 and ...♗f5 (or ...♗h3) improving Black's control of the light squares.

14.♘f4

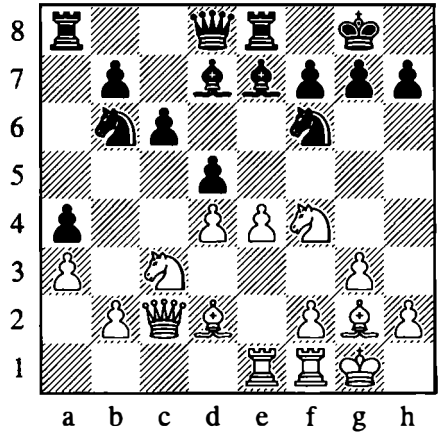
The alternative 14.f3 is well met by 14...c5! 15.dxc5 ♗xc5∓ when Black obtains a favourable version of the isolani due to White's weakened central structure and the useful a4-pawn, which secures a strong outpost on c4 for one of Black's knights.

14...c6 15.e4

Transposing into an isolated queen pawn structure.

Unfortunately White's position is not ideally

suited for the more typical plan 15.f3 intending to follow with e3-e4, because of 15...♘c4 16.♗c1 (but not 16.♘xa4? ♘xd2–+) 16...b5 when Black manages to create some pressure on the centre and kingside, preventing White's active plans. For example: 17.♔h1 (or 17.e4?! dxe4 18.fxe4 ♕b6 19.♖d1 ♗g4∓ when White's centre is more of a weakness than a strength) 17...♕b6 18.♖d1 b4!∞ With good active play for Black.



15...dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4 g6

We have reached a critical position. There is already one minor piece off the board and White does not have clear attacking chances, therefore I find his position rather delicate, meaning that a few inaccuracies will lead to a much inferior endgame.

18.h4

An alternative was 18.d5 eliminating the isolated pawn: 18...cxd5 19.♘xd5 ♘xd5 20.♗xd5 However, Black can find complications with 20...♗b5!? (or 20...♗f6=) since White's rook is trapped on f1: 21.♕e4! ♖a6 (or 21...♗xf1 22.♕f3 ♖f8 23.♔xf1= followed by ♗h6 regaining the exchange) 22.♗c3 ♗xf1 23.♔xf1 ♖f8∞ White seems to have sufficient compensation for the exchange.

18...♗d6 19.♔h2?!

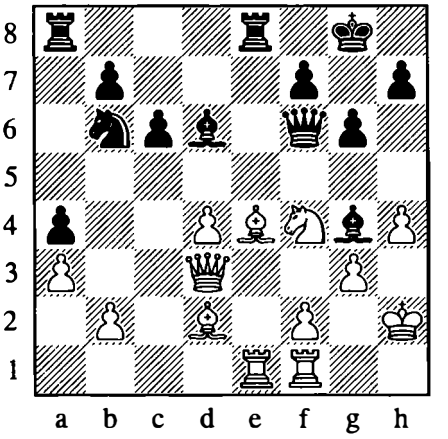
An inconsequential move. Logical was 19.h5 ♕f6 20.♕d3 with level chances.

19...♕f6 20.♕d3

Unfortunately 20.d5? is no longer possible due to: 20...♘xd5 21.♗xd5 cxd5 22.♘xd5? ♕xh4†–+

20...♗g4∓

White's position becomes unpleasant.



21.♗g2 ♗c7 22.♖xe8† ♖xe8 23.♖c1 ♕f5

Trading queens only emphasizes the weakness of the d4-pawn.

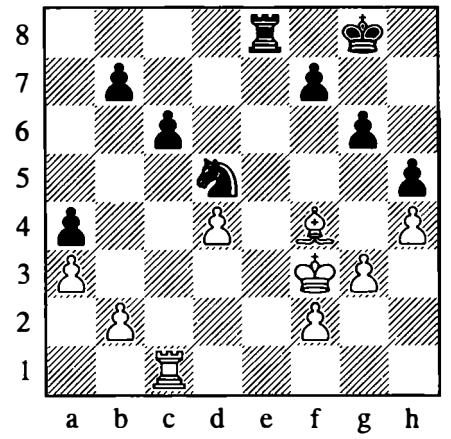
24.♕xf5 ♗xf5 25.♗f3

25.d5!? was probably better: 25...♖d8! (incorrect is 25...♗xf4?! 26.♗xf4 ♘xd5 27.♗xd5 cxd5 28.♖c7 when Black cannot maintain his advantage after 28...d4 29.♖xb7 ♖e2 30.♗h6!=) 26.♗f3 (but not 26.dxc6? ♖xd2 27.cxb7 ♖c2!∓) 26...♗xf4 27.♗xf4 ♘xd5 28.♗e5 ♗e6∓ White does not have enough counterplay for the pawn, but at least stays in the game with reasonable fighting chances.

25...h5 26.♗e3 ♗e4

It is a good decision to trade White's light-squared bishop in order to gain control of the precious d5-square.

27.♔g2 ♗xf4 28.♗xf4 ♗xf3† 29.♔xf3 ♘d5∓



It may be too soon for my assertion that Black has a clear advantage, but after analyzing the rest of the game the reader might start to agree with me. From a strategic point of view, matters are quite clear, as White has reached an endgame where the isolated d4-pawn is nothing but weak and blockaded. White's bishop on f4 has no targets whatsoever and sees its action restricted by its own pawns. All Black needs is patience and some creativity to find the right plan, which Efimenko does quite well.

30.♗d2 f6 31.♖c4 ♖a8

Of course not 31...♘b6? 32.♖b4± winning a pawn.

32.♔e4 ♔f7 33.♔d3 ♔e6 34.f3 ♖a6?!

This allows White an extra option.

35.♗c1?!

Returning the favour.

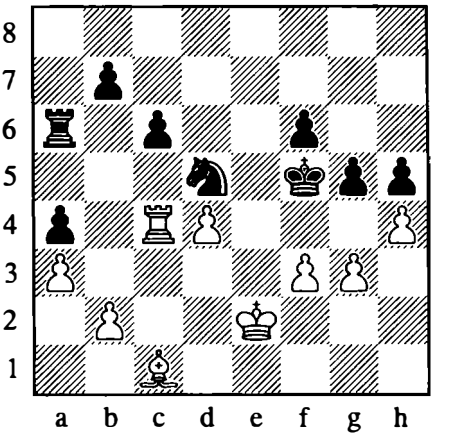
White had an opportunity to reduce his problems with 35.g4!? ♔d7∓ when things are less clear, but Black still preserves a small edge (instead 35...♖b6 is well met by 36.♔c2 ♖b3 37.gxh5 gxh5 38.♖xa4 ♖xf3 39.♖a7 b5 40.♖h7 when White has decent counterplay).

35...♔f5

Preventing g3-g4 as well as preparing the key ...g6-g5-g4 advance.

36.♔e2 g5!

Choosing the right plan. By playing ...g5-g4 Black will manage to create a serious weakness on g3.



37.♔f2

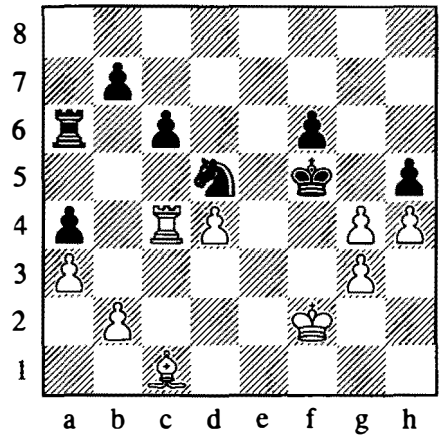
Somewhat better was: 37.hxg5 fxg5 38.♔f2 g4 The only path to an advantage. 39.♔g2 (but not 39.fxg4†? hxg4∓ as Black will follow with ...♔e4 gaining territory and creating the serious threat of ...♔d3) 39...♖b6 (or 39...gxf3† 40.♔xf3 ♖b6 transposing to 39...♖b6) 40.♖xa4 ♖b3 41.fxg4† ♔xg4 42.♖a8 ♖xg3† 43.♔h2 (or 43.♔f2 h4∓) 43...♘f6∓ White's position is still very difficult due to the passed h-pawn and the poor placement of his king.

37...g4 38.fxg4†?!

This makes Black's winning task much easier.

An alternative was 38.♔g2 gxf3† 39.♔xf3 ♖b6 40.♖xa4 ♖b3† 41.♔f2 ♔g4 42.♖a8 ♖f3† 43.♔e2 ♖xg3∓ when pushing the f-pawn should be enough to decide the game.

More stubborn was 38.♗d2 ♖b6 39.♗b4! (blocking the b-file to prevent the deadly penetration with ...♖b3) 39...♔e6 40.fxg4 hxg4 41.♔e2 f5∓ though Black has many plans to improve his position, such as ...♘f6-e4 or ...♔f7-g6-h5 followed by ...f5-f4.



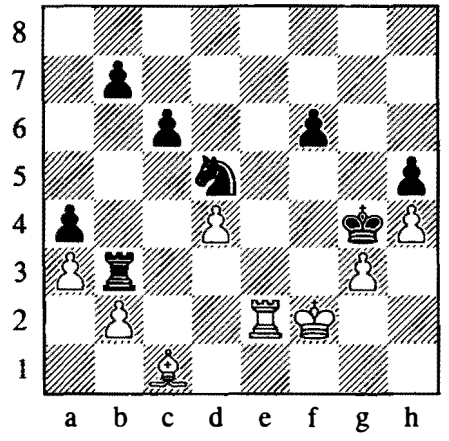
38...♔xg4 39.♖c2

As often happens, passive defence is ineffective.

39.♔g2 is no better: 39...♖b6 40.♖xa4 ♖b3 41.♖a8 ♖xg3† 42.♔f2 ♔xh4–+

39...♖b6 40.♖e2 ♖b3–+

The g3-pawn is lost, and the rest is simple.



41.♖e4† ♔h3 42.g4 hxg4 43.h5 f5 44.♖e1 ♔h2 45.h6 ♖f3† 46.♔e2 ♖h3 47.♔f1 f4 48.♖e2† ♔g3 49.♖g2† ♔f3

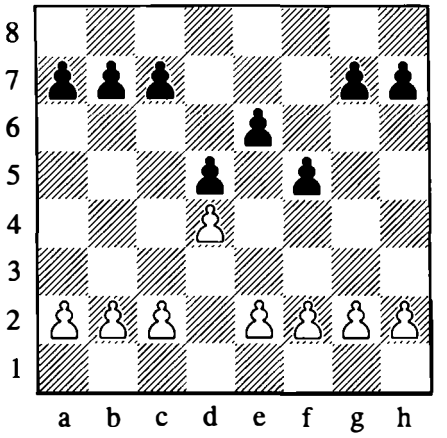
0–1

Final remarks

1. Black's queenside expansion with ...a7-a5-a4, gaining control of the light squares, played an essential role throughout the game and deserves imitation.
2. The reader might think Kuzubov did not know what he was doing, as he left his dark-squared bishop inside the pawn chain. This is not the case: the dark-squared bishop can be inside the pawn chain as long as White is planning the break e3-e4 which would render this bishop useful again.
3. White's opening did not achieve more than equality. White lost the game because after e3-e4 was played, his inaccuracies forced him into an inferior endgame. A crucial mistake was the slow 19.♔h2 steering White into passive defence.

Chapter 6

Stonewall



The Stonewall structure often arises from the Dutch Defence, the Slav or the Catalan, the first being the most common. It could also occur with reversed colours, but this is relatively rare. Of all the pawn structures we study in this book, the Stonewall has one of the worst reputations. Players from a wide range of levels would say the idea of playing ...d7-d5 together with ...f7-f5 is positionally unsound. There is partial merit to this claim, as the e5-square becomes permanently vulnerable. Whether this vulnerable square actually becomes a serious weakness often determines whether Black's position is good or not. To be honest, I myself considered the Stonewall to be a relatively bad structure until I started researching it in order to write this chapter. In fact, I originally wanted to make this chapter a manual on how to defeat this pawn structure. After a substantial amount of work I gave up on this aim, and instead decided to accept that the Stonewall is a solid system which deserves serious consideration. I hope this chapter will be enough to convince the reader that this is the case.

Then why does the Stonewall have a bad reputation?

I believe this is the effect of two types of observational bias:

1. White's wins in the Stonewall are often visually pleasing and positionally convincing. They are likely to be used as examples in strategy books. This decision unintentionally conveys the idea that the Stonewall is positionally incorrect.
2. Black's wins are often based on tactical resources of some sort, hence they can often be considered "accidental" rather than meritorious. Many players (including myself before writing this chapter) would skip those games without further study, simply thinking: "Black was just lucky, this will not happen to me."

Personally I was surprised on checking my database to realize that among IM and GM level games, White only scores about 54% with the openings presented in this chapter. This is basically a standard result, nothing special. Hence, statistically the Stonewall is slightly inferior, but no worse than many well-respected systems.

OK, that is enough defending the Stonewall, now let's discuss typical plans.

White's plans

1. Obtaining firm control of the e5-square; placing a knight on this square.
2. Trade dark-squared bishops to further weaken Black's dark squares.
3. Expand on the queenside or open the c-file at a favourable stage and pursue an invasion down this open file.

Black's plans

1. Create a kingside attack, but without completely losing control of the central squares.
2. Improve the bad bishop with the manoeuvre ...♗d7-e8-h5 or sometimes ...b7-b6 followed by ...♗a6.
3. Create central tension with ...b7-b6 followed by ...c6-c5.

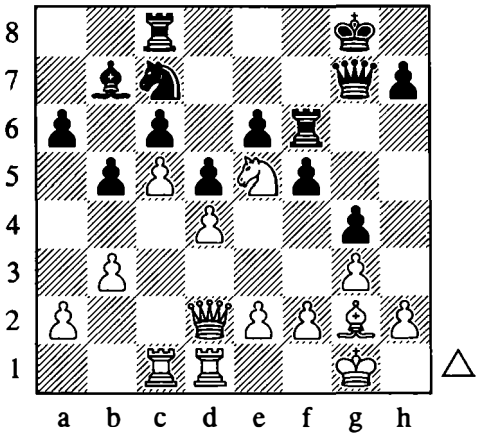
Before proceeding, I would like to clarify Black's plans somewhat. First, for Black's Plan 1 to succeed, the control of the central squares is essential. If White has undisputed control of the e5-square, then most of Black's attacking attempts will fail. A healthy attack for Black will keep a balance between fighting for the e5-square and advancing on the kingside. Black's Plan 2 is important and useful, but not always necessary. Black can find a good position even with his bishop on the humble d7-square. Finally, Black's Plans 1 and 3 should certainly not be combined. The point of Plan 1 is that the Stonewall creates a solid central structure, making a flank attack feasible. The attack would probably fail if the move ...c6-c5 had already been played.

This chapter begins by showing one short example of White's dream position in the Stonewall, simply to illustrate everything Black should fight to avoid. The second and third games are examples of White's successful strategy, controlling the centre and keeping Black without counterplay. The last three games in the chapter illustrate Black's ideas for counterplay by showcasing Black's Plans 1, 2 and 3 in that order.

Sandro Mareco – Chithambaram Aravindh

Golden Sands 2013

Learning objective: This game fragment essentially illustrates everything that could go wrong with Black's position, and how White may win convincingly under those circumstances.



As the reader may notice, White is doing extremely well in this game. To be thorough and comprehensive, let's outline exactly what is good about White's position:

1. The key e5-square is under complete control.
2. It would require about four moves for Black to remove White's knight on e5, say with ...♖f6-f8, ...♘e8-f6-d7.
3. Black's bishop is completely locked in by his pawns; there is no route into the game.
4. Black's kingside pawns are not flexible. If the g4-pawn could go back to g5, then at least it would be possible to play ...f5-f4 with a semblance of counterplay.
5. There is no real chance for Black to attack along the h-file. A plan like ...♖h6, ...♕g5-h5 is far too slow and momentarily impossible due to White's queen on d2.
6. White's pieces are very well coordinated.
7. White has an immediate queenside break with a2-a4.

This is exactly the kind of example that strategy books use, giving the impression the Stonewall is just bad. Of course, this position is just bad, but there are many things Black could have done to avoid such a disaster. For now, let's simply observe how White exploits his monumental advantage.

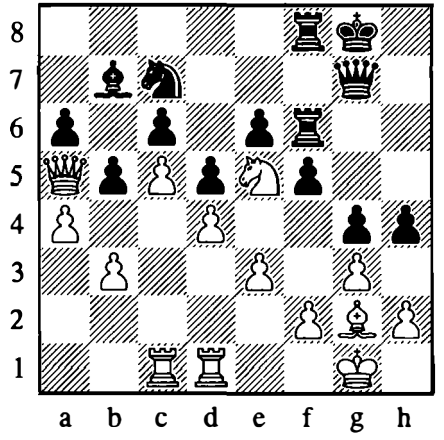
25.a4!+–

Notice that if Black had a rook on a8 and a pawn on a5, the position would be far more difficult to win, since this move would be answered by ...b5-b4, blocking the queenside. Once the queenside is open, as in this game, Black's situation is completely hopeless.

25...♖cf8 26.e3 h5

The try 26...♖h6 hoping for ...♕g5-h5 is simply met by 27.♕a5! immobilizing Black's queen, and now a possible continuation is: 27...♘e8 28.axb5 axb5 29.♖a1 ♕g5 30.♕b6+–

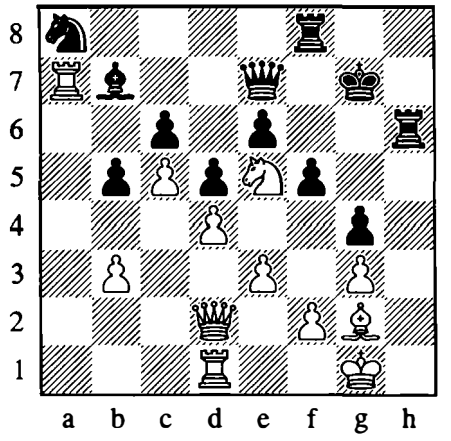
27.♕a5 h4



28.♕b6 ♘a8 29.♕a7 hxg3 30.hxg3 ♕c7 31.axb5 axb5 32.♖a1

The a-file invasion will decide the game, and the rest deserves little comment, though it is fun to watch:

32...♖h6 33.♕a5 ♕e7 34.♕d2 ♔g7 35.♖a7



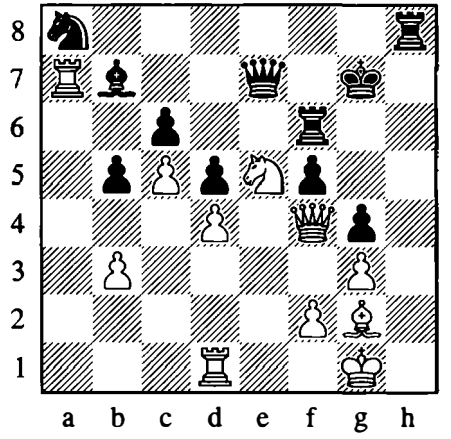
35...♖hf6 36.e4!

A nice finish. Also effective was 36.♘xc6!?.

36...♖h8

36...fxe4 can be met by 37.♕g5† ♔h7 38.♘g6! ♕d7 39.♘xf8† ♖xf8 40.♗xe4†! dxe4 41.♔g2 followed by ♖h1.

37.exf5 exf5 38.♕f4



Black resigns as his entire position falls apart. This example is rather self-explanatory; it simply serves as a guide to what *not* to allow if you play the Stonewall, or what to aim for if you play against it.

1–0

Jon Ludvig Hammer – Rune Djurhuus

Norwegian Championship 2013

Learning objectives:
This game illustrates three important elements in White's strategy:
1. Opening the c-file and invading the c7-square with major pieces.
2. Trading dark-squared bishops to emphasize the weakness of the e5-square.
3. Occupying the weak e5-square with a knight.

1.d4 e6 2.c4 f5 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c6 5.♘f3 d5 6.0–0♗d6 7.♕c2 0–0 8.♘c3

Far less common is 8.♗f4 trading dark-squared bishops immediately, since after 8...♗xf4 9.gxf4 ♘e4 there is excellent counterplay despite the weak e5-square, for example: 10.♘bd2 ♘d7 11.e3 ♕e7 12.♖ac1 ♔h8 (planning ...♖g8 and an eventual ...g7-g5) 13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.♘d2 g5 when Black was better in Hakki – Ulibin, Dubai 2002.

8...♘e4

The capture 8...dxc4?! is often a bad idea, as Black's solid centre becomes vulnerable after 9.e4! ♗c7 10.♕e2 fxe4 (or 10...b5 11.exf5 exf5 12.a4!±) 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4± with more than enough compensation.

9.♖b1

Preparing a queenside expansion with c4-c5 and b2-b4-b5.

9...a5

A healthy option was 9...♘d7 10.b4 b5! stopping the expansion. For example after 11.cxb5 ♘xc3 12.♕xc3 cxb5 (preparing ...♘b6-c4) and if 13.♕c6 Black is just in time with 13...♕b6! 14.♕xa8 ♗b8!∞ followed by ...♗b7 with a complex position as in Baryshpolets – Ponfilenok, St Petersburg 2012.

10.a3 ♘d7

The expansion cannot be prevented with 10...♕e7 since 11.b4!? comes anyway, and White is better after: 11...axb4 12.axb4 ♗xb4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♗g5 ♕d7 15.♖xb4 exf3 16.exf3±

11.b4 axb4 12.axb4 ♘xc3 13.♕xc3 b5

Preventing White's plan of c4-c5 followed by b4-b5, though creating new problems in the position.

If 13...♘f6 14.c5 ♗c7 15.♘e5± the potential b4-b5 is annoying, but 15.b5?! is premature because of 15...♘e4 16.♕c2 cxb5 17.♖xb5 b6 when Black fully equalizes.

14.♗g5 ♗e7?

Trading dark-squared bishops will only worsen Black's problems.

Better was 14...♘f6 15.cxd5 (but not 15.c5?! ♘e4! 16.♕c1 ♘xg5 17.♘xg5 ♗e7 when Black is just fine) 15...cxd5 16.♘e5 ♗d7 17.♖a1± and White has a pleasant advantage.

15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.cxd5

A timely opening of the c-file.

Another strong option was 16.c5 turning the c6-pawn into a permanent target, and after 16...♘f6 17.♖a1 ♗d7 18.♘e5± White dominates, and is likely to win the a-file with ♖a3 or ♖a5.

16...cxd5 17.♕c7?!

Conceptually correct, but tactically imprecise.

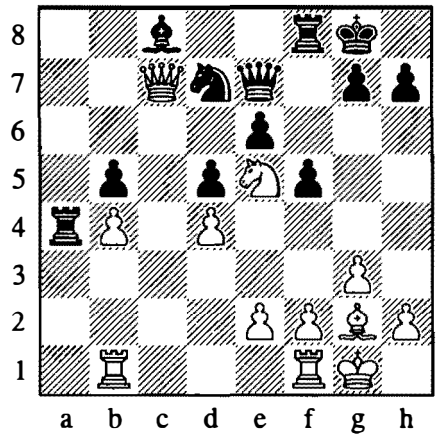
Better was 17.♕c6! preventing ...♘b6-c4 blocking the c-file: 17...♖b8 18.♖fc1 ♖b6 (but not 18...♘b6? 19.♕xb5+–) 19.♕c7 ♖b7 20.♕a5 ♕d6 21.e3± followed by ♗f1 attacking the b5-pawn.

17...♖a4?!

Returning the favour.

Better was 17...♕d8! preparing ...♘b6-c4. Then after 18.♖fc1 ♘b6 19.♘e5 ♘c4 the c-file is blocked, though after 20.♕c5!?± White retains a small advantage.

18.♘e5!±



White has obtained a dream position in the Stonewall; the dark-squared bishops are off the board, the knight has taken control of e5, and the c-file is open for a rook invasion.

18...♕d8

Heading for a near-lost endgame.

It does not help to keep queens on the board with 18...♕e8 19.♖fc1 ♘xe5 20.♕xe5 ♖a7 since after 21.♖c5!?± followed by ♖bc1 and ♖c7, only White has attacking chances.

Also 18...♖xb4?? loses to 19.♘c6.

19.♖fc1 ♕xc7 20.♖xc7 ♘xe5

It is too late for 20...♘b6 21.e3 ♘c4 due to: 22.♘xc4 dxc4 23.♗c6!±

21.dxe5

Black is rid of his weakness on e5, but the e6- and b5-pawns remain vulnerable.

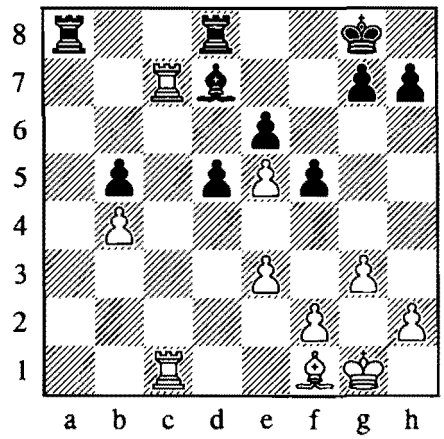
21...♖d8 22.e3 ♗d7 23.♗f1

Threatening ♖xd7.

23...♖aa8

23...♔f8? can be met by 24.♖xd7! ♖xd7 25.♗xb5 ♖aa7 26.♗xd7 ♖xd7 27.b5 with a winning endgame, though some work is required.

24.♖bc1



24...♔f8 25.♖b7?!

Natural, but imprecise.

The most accurate was 25.♖1c5! ♖ab8 26.♖a7 threatening to double rooks on the seventh rank, forcing 26...♖a8 27.♖xa8 ♖xa8 28.♗xb5± with excellent winning chances.

25...♖ab8 26.♖cc7 ♖xb7 27.♖xb7 ♗c6?!

Inaccurate; now White is in full control again.

A much better defence was 27...g5! since after 28.♗xb5 ♗xb5 29.♖xb5 d4! 30.exd4 ♖xd4 Black has drawing chances due to the weak e5-pawn.

28.♖b6 ♖c8 29.♗xb5 ♗xb5 30.♖xb5+–

This endgame is already lost, but still instructive.

30...♖c1† 31.♔g2 ♖b1 32.♖b8† ♔f7 33.♖b7† ♔f8

Black's king is awkwardly placed after 33...♔g6 34.h4.

34.h4 ♖b2 35.b5 ♖b1 36.b6 h6

Or 36...♖b4 37.h5 ♖b3 38.♔f1 ♖b2 39.♔e1 ♔g8 40.♔d1 and preventing White's king penetration will lead Black into zugzwang.

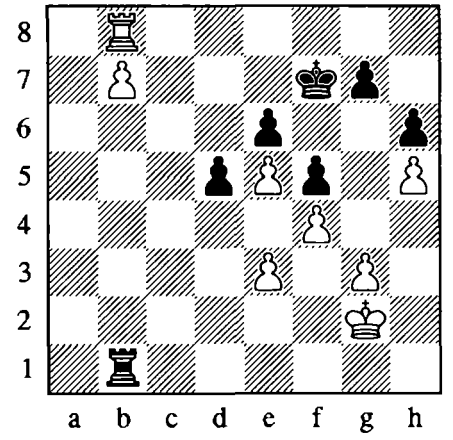
37.♖b8† ♔f7 38.h5!

Fixing the kingside pawns.

38...♔e7

38...g6? loses to 39.♖b7† ♔g8 40.hxg6.

39.b7 ♔f7 40.f4!



Black resigns as he is helpless against the continuation: 40...♖b5 41.♔f3 ♖b2 42.g4 fxg4† 43.♔xg4 ♖b3 44.f5 exf5† 45.♔xf5 ♖b5 46.e6† ♔e7 47.♖g8 ♖xb7 48.♖xg7†

1–0

Final remarks

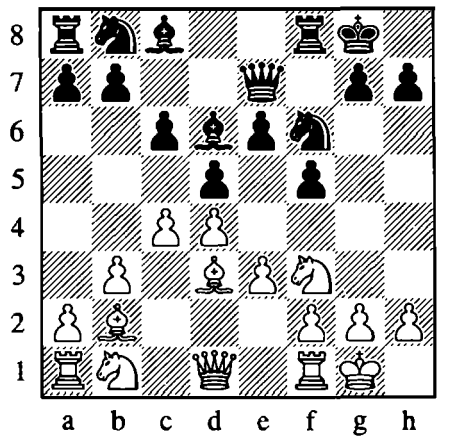
1. Black's problems started early in the game; his chances could be improved with 9...♘d7. Instead 9...a5 was not enough to prevent the queenside expansion, and paradoxically, the opening of the a-file helped White in most variations.
2. White's queenside attack with b2-b4-b5 proved to be a sound plan, provoking Black to play ...b7-b5. This advance prevented the b4-b5 break, but turned the b5-pawn into a serious weakness.
3. Black's biggest mistake was trading dark-squared bishops, emphasizing the uselessness of his light-squared bishop, and giving up control of the e5-square.

Ognjen Cvitan – Darko Doric

Rijeka 2006

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White may slowly constrain Black's forces to eventually win through a kingside invasion.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗d3 f5 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.b3 ♕e7 8.♗b2 0–0



9.♘c3

The beginning of an interesting plan.

Another popular option is to insist on trading dark-squared bishops with 9.♕c1 b6 10.♗a3 and now Black may allow the exchange with 10...♘bd7 (or prevent the exchange with 10...c5!? 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.♘c3 ♗a6 with level chances as in Petrik – S. Zhigalko, Aix-les-Bains 2011) 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘bd2 ♗b7 14.♘c4 ♕e7 15.♘fe5 ♖ac8 16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♘e5 ♕e7 18.♕b2 c5 when Black had solved all his problems in Delchev – Tregubov, France 2009.

9...♘e4 10.♘e2

This move prepares ♘e5 followed by f2-f3 which will give White good control of the centre.

10...♘d7 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♗c7

Another alternative was:

12...♗c5 13.♗d4

Preparing f2-f3.

Also an option is the untested 13.♘d4!?±.

13...♗a3

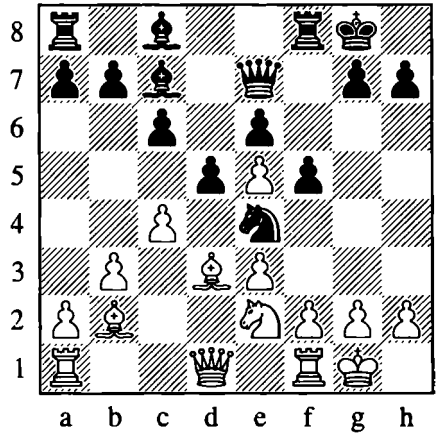
With the idea of ...c6-c5.

14.♖b1

14.f3 is met by 14...c5! 15.cxd5 (15.fxe4?! dxe4∓) 15...exd5 16.fxe4 cxd4 17.exd5 ♕xe5 18.exd4 ♕e3† 19.♔h1 ♗d6 with a comfortable position for Black.

14...b6 15.♗b2 ♗xb2 16.♖xb2 ♗b7 17.f3 ♘c5

With level chances in Olszewski – S. Zhigalko, Puerto Madryn 2009. Note that Black's light-squared bishop will come into the game after ...c6-c5.



This is the first critical moment in the game. Black's main problem is to find a good use for the light-squared bishop. The typical ...♗d7-e8-h5 manoeuvre will not benefit Black since White simply responds with f2-f3. Hence, the only alternative is to place the bishop on the a8-h1 diagonal and advance ...c6-c5. On the other hand, White's objective will be to play c4-c5 obtaining a lasting advantage by restraining Black's bishop permanently.

13.♖c1

A logical move, supporting c4-c5.

Another logical alternative was 13.♕c2!? also supporting c4-c5, and now after 13...♗b6 (better was 13...♗d7 14.♖ac1 ♖ac8 15.c5 b6 fighting against the c5-pawn) 14.♖ac1 ♗d7 15.c5! White gained a lasting advantage: 15...♗c7 (15...♗xc5?? 16.♗xe4+– or 15...♘xc5?? 16.♗a3+–) 16.f3 ♘g5 17.♗d4 ♖fb8 18.a4 b6 19.b4 ♕d8 20.♖b1 bxc5 21.♕xc5 a5 22.b5± Shariyazdanov – Beshukov, Biel 2002.

13...♗d7 14.f3 ♗b6?!

This move turns out to be a crucial waste of two tempos.

If 14...♘g5?! then 15.c5± restricts the light-squared bishop, and is similar to the game.

A good alternative was 14...♘c5 15.♗b1 (or 15.♗a3 ♗xe5 16.cxd5 ♗d6 where Black is just fine; more precise is 15.cxd5!? cxd5 16.♗a3 ♗b6 17.♘d4 with a tiny advantage for White) 15...dxc4 16.♖xc4 ♘a6! when Black equalizes after ...c6-c5, bringing the light-squared bishop into the game.

15.♘d4 ♘g5

If 15...♘c5 16.♗a3± and the pin is somewhat annoying.

16.♕c2

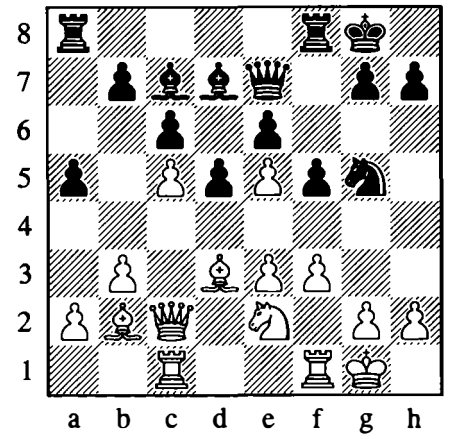
Threatening c4-c5.

16...a5?!

This is a rather inaccurate move, though it made no difference in the game. The reason I do not like this move will become clear in my note to White's 19th.

If 16...c5 (preventing c4-c5) then 17.♘xf5!? (or the simple 17.♘e2 ♖ac8 18.♘f4± when Black's centre is somewhat vulnerable) 17...exf5 18.cxd5 c4 19.♗xc4 ♗xe3† 20.♔h1 when the position is rather unclear, but White's chances are certainly preferable.

17.c5 ♗c7 18.♘e2±



White has a lasting positional edge thanks to his spatial advantage and Black's restricted light-squared bishop.

18...b5?! 19.a3?!

This is positionally correct, but White misses a stronger continuation.

The reason I did not like 16...a5 is because after 19.cxb6! it is not possible to recapture ...axb6; thus after 19...♗xb6 20.♗d4 White gains control of the key c5-square, say after: 20...♖ab8 21.♗c5 ♗xc5 22.♕xc5 ♕xc5 23.♖xc5 ♘f7 24.f4±

19...♘f7?

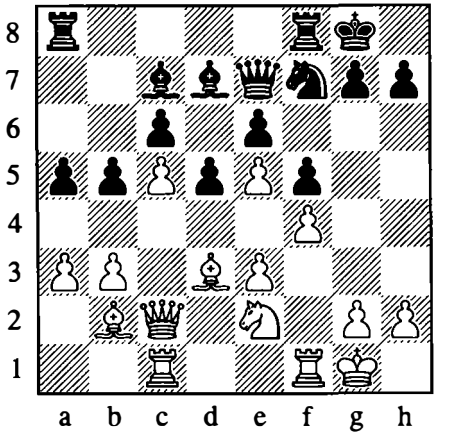
This is a colossal mistake that should be well understood by the reader. Before playing this move Black had reasonable fighting chances, since White's pieces could not be mobilized so easily. The e5-pawn was vulnerable, hence natural moves, like moving the bishop away from b2 or playing ♘d4, were impossible. If White had played f3-f4, then Black could have responded with ...♘e4.

It was better to prepare ...b5-b4 with 19...♖fb8, for example: 20.b4 ♖a7 when Black can create some counterplay down the a-file, or 20.♗d4 b4 21.a4 (21.♖a1!?± was better) 21...♗c8 followed by .. ♗a6 with a reasonable position for Black.

But now that Black has played ...♘f7, the following move is logical and very strong:

20.f4±

Black's knight does not have a route back to e4, hence weakening the e4-square is not a problem at all. From this point I think Black's position is nearly lost, and the reader should pay close attention to how White manages to gradually increase his advantage without giving Black any hope of counterplay.



20...♘h6 21.♘d4 ♖ab8 22.h3

Covering the g4-square and preparing an expansion with g2-g4.

22...g6

Maybe it was better to attempt something like 22...b4 23.a4?! (of course it is better to play 23.♖a1!?±) 23...♕e8 24.♖f2 ♗c8 25.g3 ♖a8 26.♖g2 ♗a6 trading the light-squared bishop.

23.♖f2 ♔f7 24.♘f3 ♔e8 25.g3

Cvitan seems to be enjoying himself. He takes his time, but every move brings him one step closer to the win. Now he is preparing ♖g2 and g3-g4.

25...♔d8 26.♖g2 ♔c8 27.g4 ♗d8

Of course 27...fxg4 28.hxg4 only worsens Black's pawn structure.

28.♔h2

Again, White does not hurry to open the position yet, as there is no need to do so. Instead,

Cvitan slowly arranges his pieces in optimal locations.

28...♗c7 29.♕d2 ♗e8 30.♔g1 ♗d7 31.♕e1 ♗e8 32.b4

This is played in order to support the c5-pawn, as White wants to use his rook on the kingside.

32...a4

Having a closed queenside, the rest is just a matter of technique.

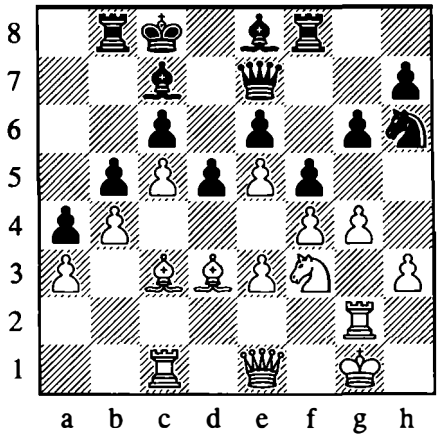
Opening the a-file with 32...axb4?! 33.axb4 does not exactly help Black, for example: 33...♖a8 (33...♔b7 34.♗d4 ♖a8 35.♗xb5! Opening lines for attack. 35...cxb5 36.c6† ♗xc6 37.♖gc2+–) 34.♖a1 ♖xa1 35.♕xa1 ♔b7 36.♗c3 Followed by ♖a2 with a winning attack.

It was probably better to keep the tension with 32...♖a8!? but after 33.♖a1!? threatening a3-a4, Black does not have anything better than 33...a4, which is similar to the game.

33.♗c3!+–

This move is logical and very strong. It might seem premature, but after this move Black's position is already clearly lost, for the following reasons:

1. White has a significant spatial advantage, allowing him to manoeuvre freely with his pieces.
2. Only White can open the position favourably, which he will do only once all his forces are ready for the final invasion.
3. Black's light-squared bishop is locked in and cannot contribute to Black's play.
4. With the last move, White shows the beginning of the winning strategy. His first step is to play ♗c3-e1-h4 to make good use of his bad bishop.



33...♔b7 34.♕e2 ♗d8 35.♗e1 ♔a6 36.♗h4 ♕c7 37.♗xd8 ♕xd8

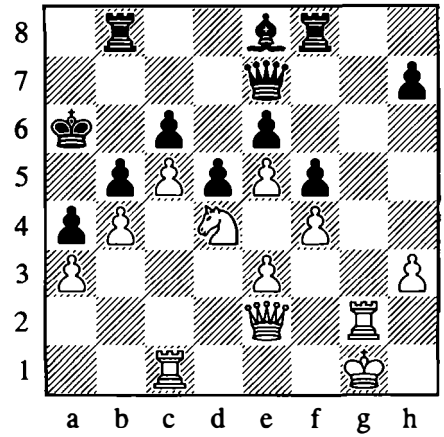
The first stage is complete. White has exchanged his bad bishop for Black's good bishop; note how weak the dark squares in Black's camp have become.

38.♘d4 ♕e7 39.gxf5

A strong alternative was the direct 39.♕d1! threatening ♕xa4, and now 39...♔a7 40.♗xb5! cxb5 41.c6 gives White a winning attack, since Black's forces lack space and coordination to defend: 41...♔a8 42.♖c5 (threatening ♘xb5) 42...♖b6 43.g5 ♘f7 44.♕c2 (threatening c6-c7) 44...♔b8 45.♖xb5 ♖xb5 46.♘xb5 ♗xc6 47.♕xc6

39...♘xf5 40.♗xf5 gxf5

If 40...exf5 White can progress with: 41.♕f2 ♔b7 42.h4 ♗d7 43.♕g3 ♖be8 44.♕g5 ♕f7 (or 44...♕xg5 45.♖xg5) 45.♔f2 Followed by ♖h1 and h4-h5 winning.



The second stage is complete; White has opened the g-file and removed all strategic impurities from the position by trading his bishop for Black's knight. We are left with a winning battle between White's strong knight and Black's useless light-squared bishop. It is impossible to prevent the invasion down the g-file.

41.♔h2 ♔b7 42.♖cg1 ♗g6 43.♖g5
Progressing slowly but surely.

A more direct winning approach was: 43.♖xg6!? hxg6 44.♖xg6 ♖g8 45.♖xe6 ♕g7 46.♕f2 ♖h8 (threatening ...♖xh3 followed by ...♖h8) 47.♕g2 ♕xg2† 48.♔xg2 ♖bg8† 49.♔h2

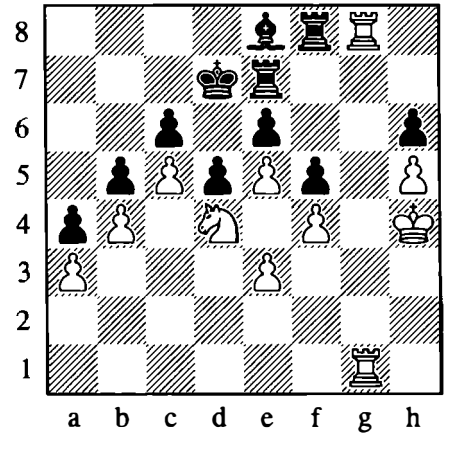
43...♖g8 44.♕f2 ♖be8 45.♕h4 ♔c7
If 45...♕g7 preventing 46.♕h6, then 46.♖5g3 ♔c7 47.♕g5 followed by h3-h4-h5 winning.

46.♕h6
Threatening the decisive h3-h4-h5.

46...♕f8 47.♕xf8 ♖gxf8 48.h4 ♖e7 49.♔h3
At this point pretty much every plan will win. White continues to take his time and improve his position slowly.

Another option was 49.h5 ♗e8 50.♖g7 ♔d7 51.h6 since 51...♗g6 fails due to 52.♖xe7† ♔xe7 53.♘xc6† ♔d7 54.♘d4.

49...♔d7 50.h5 ♗e8 51.♔h4 h6 52.♖g8



52...♖ef7
If 52...♖xg8 53.♖xg8 ♖h7 White has the nice 54.♖g6! ♗xg6 (or 54...♗f7 55.♖f6 zugzwang! 55...♗g8 56.♖f8 ♗f7 57.♖a8+–) 55.hxg6 ♖h8 56.♔h5 ♔e7 57.g7 ♖g8 58.♔g6! h5 59.♘f3 followed by ♔h7 and wins.

53.♖xf8 ♖xf8 54.♖g7† ♖f7 55.♖g6 ♖e7
No better is 55...♖h7 56.♖xe6.

56.♖xh6 ♖g7 57.♖xe6 ♖g4† 58.♔h3 ♖g1 59.h6
1–0

Final remarks

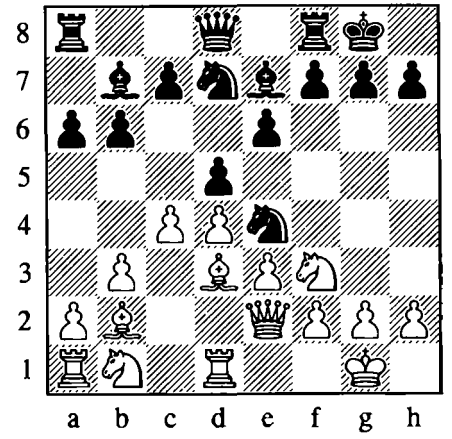
1. Black's first mistake was allowing White to play c4-c5, which prevented ...c6-c5, hence restricting the light-squared bishop. This was essentially an opening imprecision. It was necessary to play 12...♗c5 or 14...♘c5.
2. The second mistake was to play 19...♘f7 allowing 20.f4 reinforcing White's central dominance. This mistake was essentially decisive.
3. White's win was slow but very convincing and a great model of how to exploit the advantage. Improving Black's play after move 20 would provide more resistance, but probably would not change the overall result.

Emilio Cordova – Igor Naumkin

Livigno 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates Black's chances for a direct checkmating attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.e3 b6 4.♗d3 ♗b7 5.0–0 ♗e7 6.c4 0–0 7.b3 d5 8.♗b2 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 a6 10.♖d1 ♘e4



11.♘e1?!

Not exactly a mistake, but certainly heading in the wrong direction. White intends to play f2-f3 in order to chase away Black's strong knight on e4.

A healthier alternative was 11.♘e5 f5 12.f3 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘c5 with roughly equal chances in the game Cordova – Ordaz Valdes, Monterrey 2010.

11...f5!

A good decision, reinforcing the knight on e4, and going into a Stonewall-type position under favourable circumstances. The reader should note two essential characteristics in this position:

1. Black's knight is already on e4, creating some chances for a kingside attack.
2. Black's light-squared bishop can always become active after a timely ...dxc4 opening the a8-h1 diagonal.

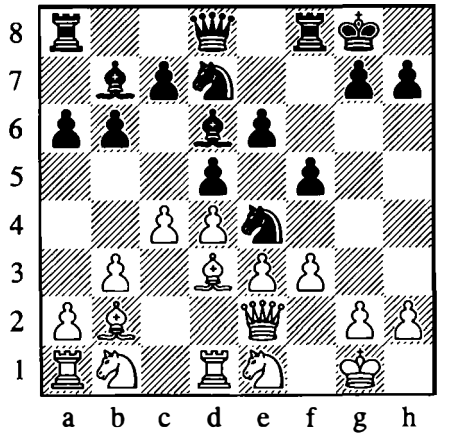
For these two reasons, White should be particularly cautious, and not expect the usual solid position against the Stonewall.

12.f3?!

A careless move based on a tactical oversight. It was better to play 12.♘d2 though after 12...♗d6 Black has a comfortable position.

12...♗d6!

My favourite move in the game. This position perfectly illustrates Black's attacking potential. White wanted to push the knight away in order to obtain a comfortable positional advantage, but Black simply leaves it there. Is it possible to take it?



13.fxe4?

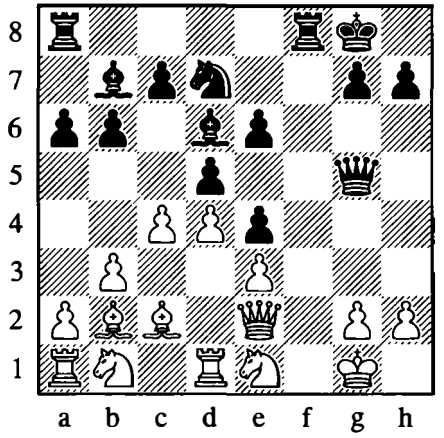
White does not want to admit that 12.f3 was simply a weakening move, hence he accepts the challenge. Unfortunately for him, Black's attack is even stronger than it seems.

It was better to accept the mistake and play 13.♘c3 after which Black gains the initiative with: 13...♕h4 14.f4 (but not 14.g3? because of 14...♘xg3! 15.hxg3 ♗xg3 when White is completely helpless against the threat of ...♖f6-g6, and 16.♗a3 hoping to respond to 16...♖f6 with 17.♗e7, is simply answered by 16...c5) 14...♘df6 The position is about equal, but it is Black who can fight for the advantage.

13...fxe4 14.♗c2 ♕g5!

A very strong move, preparing ...♘f6-g4 to which White does not have a satisfactory defence despite having an extra piece. Black's pawns on d5 and e4 are the key as they restrict the mobility of White's forces.

It is possible that White expected 14...♕h4? 15.g3 (but not 15.h3?? ♕g3 followed by ...♕h2#) 15...♕h3 threatening to double rooks on the f-file and now 16.♕g2 ♕h6 17.♕e2 ♕h3 leads to a draw by repetition.



15.♘d2

At first sight, White seems to defend with:

15.g3

But after:

15...♘f6

Black threatens ...♘g4 and ...♖f2 or ...♘h5xg3.

Now White's problems become more apparent.

A possible continuation is:

16.♘g2 ♘h5

But not 16...♘g4? 17.♘f4!.

17.♖f1

17.g4 ♖f3! and Black wins after either 18.gxh5 ♕xh5 or 18.♘d2 ♕xg4.

17...♘xg3! 18.hxg3 ♕xg3

Threatening ...♕h2#.

19.♖f4 g5

Winning the rook.

The best defence was trading bishops with: 15.♗a3 ♗xa3 (or 15...c5 16.♘d2 ♘f6 with a strong attack) 16.♘xa3 ♘f6 17.cxd5 (17.h3? ♘h5–+ threatening ...♘g3 and ...♖f1) 17...exd5 18.♘d3 White has to return the piece sooner or later. 18...exd3 19.♗xd3 ♘g4∓

15...♘f6 16.♘ef3

The only move; White really does not have any other way to bring his pieces back to the defence, and a knight on f3 is very much needed to protect h2, and to block the f-file.

Even the similar move 16.♘df3? loses to: 16...♕h5 (threatening ..♗xh2†) 17.h3 (or 17.♖d2 exf3 18.♘xf3 dxc4 19.bxc4 ♘g4 20.h3 ♖xf3! 21.gxf3 ♘h2–+) 17...exf3 18.♘xf3 ♘e4 threatening ...dxc4 and ...♘g5 (or ...♘g3).

16...exf3 17.♘xf3 ♕h5

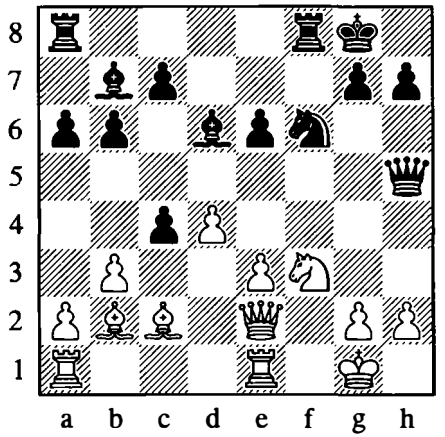
The attack continues; the threat is ...♗xh2†.

18.♖e1

Worse is 18.h3 ♘e4–+ as in the note above.

18...dxc4

Even Black's light-squared bishop, the famous "bad bishop" in the Stonewall, comes into the attack.



19.e4

White has nothing better than giving up a pawn in order to block the bishop on b7.

White cannot recapture with 19.bxc4 because of 19...♘g4 with a crushing attack. 20.h3 ♖xf3! 21.gxf3 (21.hxg4?? ♕h2#) 21...♘h2 22.♔f1 ♘xf3† Mate is coming soon.

19...cxb3 20.axb3

Black's strategy has been a success: he has an extra pawn for no compensation, and all his pieces actively contribute to the attack. I will leave the rest of the game with shorter comments as it is less relevant to the subject of this chapter.

20...♗b4 21.♖f1 a5 22.♖ac1 c5

Undermining White's control of the centre.

23.♗d3?!

A better defence was: 23.♖cd1 cxd4 24.♗xd4 ♗c5∓

23...♖ad8

The d4-pawn has become vulnerable.

24.h3?

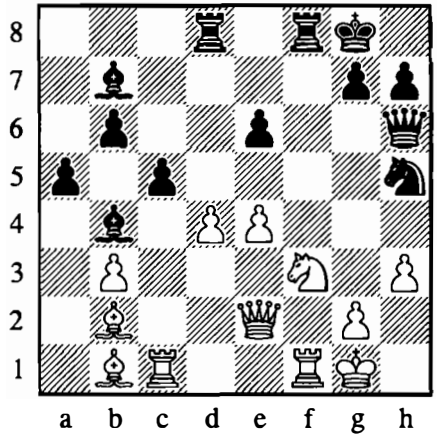
Weakening the position decisively. It was safer to "sit and wait" with 24.♖c2 although Black can make progress slowly with: 24...♖d7 25.♖d1 ♖fd8∓

24...♕h6!

Making room for the knight transfer ...♘h5-g3 (or f4).

25.♗b1 ♘h5–+

Black's multiple threats decide the game.



26.♘e5 ♘f4 27.♕g4 ♗d2 28.♔h2 ♘h5

But not 28...♗xc1?? 29.♗xc1± losing the knight on f4.

29.g3

29.♖cd1 is useless because of: 29...♖f4! 30.♕e2 (or 30.♖xf4 ♕xf4† 31.♕xf4 ♗xf4† 32.♔g1 ♗xe5) 30...♖xf1 31.♖xf1 ♗f4† 32.♔g1 ♘g3

29...♗a6

Winning the f-file, but not 29...♗xc1?? 30.♗xc1 when Black's queen is trapped.

30.♖xf8†

30.♗d3 ♗xd3 31.♘xd3 ♗xc1 32.♗xc1 ♕g6 and wins.

30...♖xf8 31.♖g1 ♗e3 32.♖g2 ♗f1

The rest is simple.

33.♘d7 ♖d8 34.dxc5 bxc5 35.♗f6 ♖xd7 36.e5 ♘xf6 37.♕xe6† ♖f7 38.exf6 ♕xf6
0–1

Final remarks

1. The key to Black's successful attack was his e4-pawn, which prevented White from bringing pieces into the defence.
2. It is worth studying how Black's attack was conducted while having control of the centre. Imagine how difficult it would have been to create threats if White had been able to place a knight on e5.

Levon Aronian – Evgeny Tomashevsky

FIDE World Cup, Tromsø 2013

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's light-squared bishop becoming powerful after the manoeuvre ...♗d7-e8-h5.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗d3 f5 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.b3 ♕e7

So far we have been following Cvitan – Doric from page 108

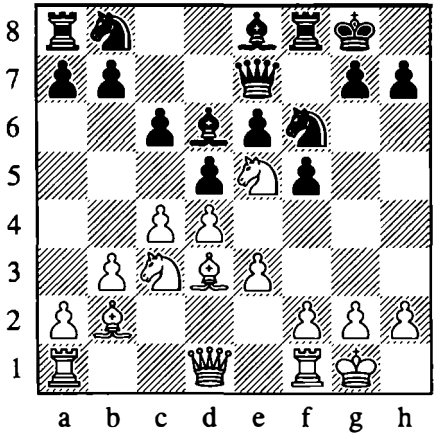
8.♘e5

This is a rare move order, though ♘e5 is a standard move in general in this opening.

As we mentioned previously, a more popular choice is 8.♗b2 0–0 and now either 9.♘c3, or 9.♕c1!? followed by ♗a3.

8...0–0 9.♗b2 ♗d7 10.♘c3 ♗e8

The manoeuvre ...♗c8-d7-e8 is standard in this position. The light-squared bishop is of little use on c8, so Tomashevsky brings the bishop to e8 where it is ready to be activated with ...♗h5 once the right moment comes.



11.cxd5

An alternative was 11.♘e2!? which is similar to the Cvitan – Doric game.

If 11.♕c2 Black can simply continue with: 11...♘bd7 12.cxd5 (or 12.♘e2!? ♖c8) 12...exd5 13.f4 (but not 13.♘xd7? ♗xd7∓ when Black has an excellent version of the Carlsbad, similar to Getz – Agdestein; 14.♗xf5?! runs into 14...♗xf5 15.♕xf5 ♘e4 16.♕h3 ♖f6∓) 13...g6 With approximately level chances.

11...cxd5 12.♖c1 ♘c6

The reader should note that White cannot really play for more than equality in this position. The knight on e5 is not particularly useful, and Black's bishop on e8 is not more restricted than White's bishop on b2.

13.♘b5 ♗b4 14.a3 ♗a5 15.♗e2 a6 16.♘c3 ♘e4 17.b4

But not 17.f3? losing a pawn after: 17...♘xc3 18.♗xc3 ♗xc3 19.♖xc3 ♘xe5 20.dxe5 ♕xa3∓

17...♗c7 18.♘xe4?!

It is generally inconvenient for White to take on e4 before placing a pawn on f4.

It was healthier to accept equality with 18.f4 ♘xe5 19.fxe5 ♗c6 20.♘xe4 fxe4 with a probable draw.

18...fxe4

Now Black has pressure down the f-file, with the f2-pawn being quite vulnerable.

19.♕b3

Again 19.f4 was superior: 19...exf3 20.♘xf3 ♗h5 The light-squared bishop comes into the game! 21.♕d2 ♖f7 With a microscopic advantage for Black.

If 19.♘xc6?! ♗xc6 Black has excellent attacking chances on the kingside, for example 20.♕d2 ♖f6 21.f4 (or 21.g3 ♕f7∓ followed by ...♖f8) 21...exf3 22.♖xf3 ♖xf3 23.♗xf3 ♕h4 24.g3 ♕g5∓ with the threat of ...h7-h5-h4.

19...♗xe5 20.dxe5

The e5-pawn is now a permanent weakness.

20...♕g5 21.♔h1?!

It was necessary to prevent Black's next move.

Better was:

21.♕d1!

Preventing 21...♗h5, and in a way saving the e5-pawn tactically.

21...♖f7

Preparing ...♘xe5.

If 21...♘xe5?! White gains compensation for the pawn after: 22.♖c7 ♖f7 23.♖xf7 ♘xf7 24.f4!?

But 21...♖d8!? allows Black to keep a tiny advantage.

22.♗g4 ♗d7 23.♗h5!

This curious move is the key.

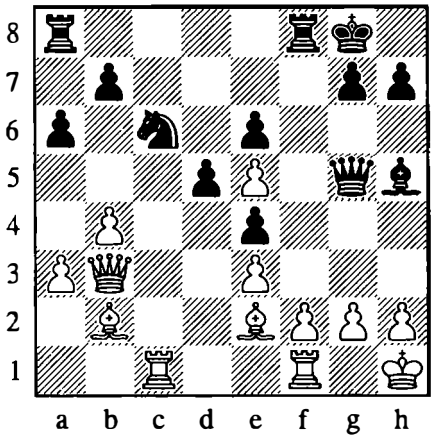
23...g6

Or 23...♖e7 24.♕g4!.

24.♗e2

White is holding, since 24...♘xe5? now fails to: 25.h4! ♕f6 26.♕d4+–

21...♗h5!∓



I find it difficult to believe that throughout the past four moves Aronian seems to have been heading in this direction voluntarily. He had a clear chance to equalize with 18.f4, and even 19.f4 was better than this position. Black's strategy has succeeded in every way. Let's spell out why:

1. Black does not have to worry about a weak e5-square. Instead, White has a weak e5-pawn to worry about.
2. There is pressure down the f-file, thanks to the strong pawn on e4.
3. Black has managed to activate his bad bishop with ...♗d7-e8-h5.
4. White's bishop on b2 is practically useless at the moment.

22.f3

Trading light-squared bishops seems quite dangerous:

22.♗xh5 ♕xh5

For example:

23.♕d1

Instead, the careless 23.h3? is met by the strong: 23...♖f3! 24.♔h2 (24.gxf3?? ♕xh3† 25.♔g1 exf3–+) 24...♖af8 (threatening ...♖xh3 followed by ...♖f3 with forced mate) 25.♕d1 ♖xh3† 26.gxh3 ♖f3 27.♕xf3 ♕xf3–+

23...♕h4

Keeping queens on the board.

Also interesting was 23...♕g5!?.

24.♖c2 ♖f5

Preparing ...♖h5.

25.f4 exf3 26.gxf3

26.♖xf3? ♖af8∓

26...♕h3!?∓

Even worse is 22.♕d1? ♗xe2 23.♕xe2 ♖f7∓ since the e5-pawn is about to fall.

22...♕h6

A prophylactic move, preparing ...exf3 followed by doubling rooks on the f-file.

The variation 22...exf3 23.gxf3 ♖f5? 24.f4! illustrates the importance of playing 22...♕h6. Now 24...♕h6 25.♕c2 and White solves most of his problems.

23.♖ce1 exf3 24.gxf3 ♖f7 25.♗c1

No better is 25.f4 ♗xe2 26.♖xe2 ♘e7! 27.♖g2 ♘f5∓ since the bishop on b2 is no opponent for a knight on f5.

An alternative was 25.♕d3 but after 25...♘e7 (threatening ...♘f5) 26.e4 ♕f4∓ White's position is very uncomfortable.

25...♗g6?!

There is nothing wrong with this move, but there was a more immediate win. Black could have decided the game with the precise: 25...♘xe5! 26.e4 ♗xf3†! This shot was probably missed by both players (instead 26...♕f6? gives away most of the advantage after 27.exd5 exd5 28.♗b2∓) 27.♗xf3 ♕h3 Black goes into a winning endgame after the relatively forced line: 28.exd5 ♖xf3 29.♖xf3 ♘xf3 30.♗f4 ♕g4 31.♖f1 ♕xf4 32.♖xf3 ♕c1† 33.♔g2 ♕g5† 34.♖g3 ♕d2† 35.♔h3 exd5–+

26.e4 ♕h3 27.exd5 ♘d4 28.♕d1 ♘xe2 29.♕xe2 ♗h5!

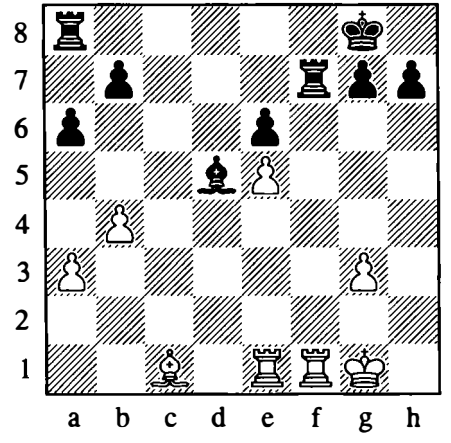
The f3-pawn is now lost. But not: 29...exd5? 30.e6 ♖c7 31.♖f2∓

30.♔g1 ♗xf3 31.♕f2 ♕g4†

An interesting alternative; instead of deciding the game immediately through tactical means, Tomashevsky heads into a won endgame, where he displays his positional mastery in an impeccable way.

A more tactical approach was 31...♖af8! 32.dxe6 ♕xe6 33.♕g3 ♗c6 with a winning attack.

32.♕g3 ♕xg3† 33.hxg3 ♗xd5–+



The endgame is won, since White has absolutely nothing to aim for, while Black has many pawns to attack, such as a3, e5 and g3. Throughout the remaining part of the game, the reader should notice how Black's 'bad' bishop is actually extremely strong, while White's bishop is relatively useless in most variations. The position is not exactly a model of the Stonewall anymore, but it certainly deserves study as an example of endgame technique.

34.♗e3 a5 35.b5 a4

Disconnecting the queenside pawns. Tomashevsky knows his pawns on b7 and a4 cannot be captured, hence he will always have pawns on both flanks, which is often a prerequisite for winning.

36.♖xf7 ♔xf7 37.♖f1† ♔g6 38.♖f4 h6

Black can take time to improve his position before taking decisive measures.

39.♔f2 ♗b3 40.♖g4† ♔h7 41.♖d4 ♖c8 42.b6 ♖c2† 43.♔e1

More stubborn was 43.♖d2 but after 43...♖c3 44.♗d4 ♖c8!? I could not find a way to hold White's position, for example: 45.♔e3 ♗d5 46.♖b2 ♖c1 47.♔d2 (or 47.♖d2? ♖g1–+) 47...♖a1 48.♗c5 g5!? 49.♖c2 ♖h1 50.♖c1 ♖h2† 51.♔d3 ♔g6 Followed by ...♔h5-g4.

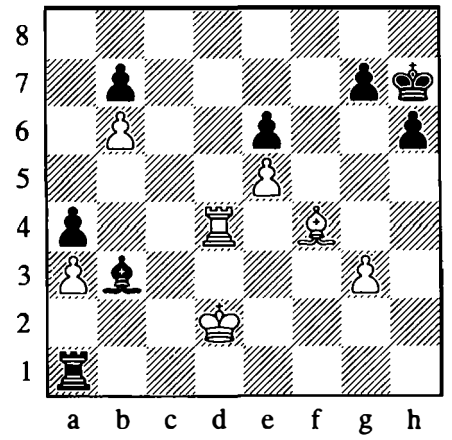
43...♖a2

And now White's position simply falls apart.

44.♗c1

Instead 44.♖d7? loses on the spot after: 44...♖xa3 45.♖xb7 ♗d5! Attacking rook and bishop. 46.♗c1 ♖xg3–+

44...♖g2 45.♗f4 ♖g1† 46.♔d2 ♖a1



The a3-pawn falls, and the rest is simple for Black.

47.♔c3
Not 47.♖d7?? ♖d1†–+.

47...♖xa3 48.♔b4 ♖a1 49.♗d2
49.♖d7 ♗d5–+

49...♗d5 50.♗c3 ♖a2 51.♖d3 ♔g6 52.♖d4 a3 53.♖d3 ♔f5 54.♗d2 ♖a1 55.♗c3 ♖a2 56.♗d2 ♔e4 57.♖e3† ♔d4 58.♗c1 ♖c2
0–1

Final remarks

1. The usefulness of Black's bishop manoeuvre is best illustrated in the note to White's 19th move. Aronian was probably dissatisfied with this position and so chose a different alternative which proved to be worse.
2. In general, the pawn structure transformations which occurred on moves 18-20 do not help White, as the e5-square becomes unavailable and particularly the e5-pawn becomes a target while Black lacks clear weaknesses.

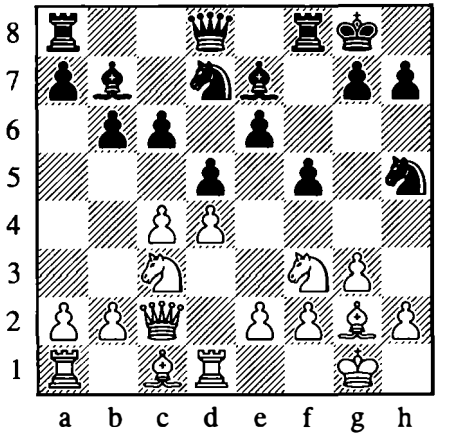
Dronavalli Harika – Michael Adams

Gibraltar 2010

Learning objective: This game is an example of how Black may create central pressure with ...b7-b6 and ...c6-c5.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗b4† 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♗g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♕c2 b6 9.♖d1 ♘bd7 10.♗f4 ♗b7 11.♘c3 ♘h5 12.♗c1
Planning to redevelop the bishop with b2-b3 followed by ♗b2.

12...f5



We have reached the position of interest via a well-known theoretical line. Something to note about this position is that, unlike previous examples, Black's pieces are very well arranged for a ...c6-c5 break. Black's bishop is already on b7, the rook is coming to the c-file, and White is far from controlling the e5-square. Hence, Black has a clear way to find counterplay and make use of his 'bad' bishop.

13.b3
Black has a perfectly solid position after 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♗d2 ♖c8 15.♖ac1 b5 16.♕b3 a6 17.a4 b4 18.♘a2 a5 with a level game.

13...♖c8 14.e3 ♗d6

Black rearranges his pieces for the break ...c6-c5, while always keeping an eye on the e5-square.

The break 14...c5? is premature due to the simple 15.cxd5 exd5 16.♗b2 threatening dxc5 or ♘e5. Black's centre is far too vulnerable: 16...g6 (16...c4? loses to 17.♘e5!) 17.♕d2 (preparing dxc5) 17...cxd4 (again 17...c4 18.♘e5!±) 18.♘xd4 ♘c5 19.♘de2± Winning a healthy pawn after 20.♘xd5.

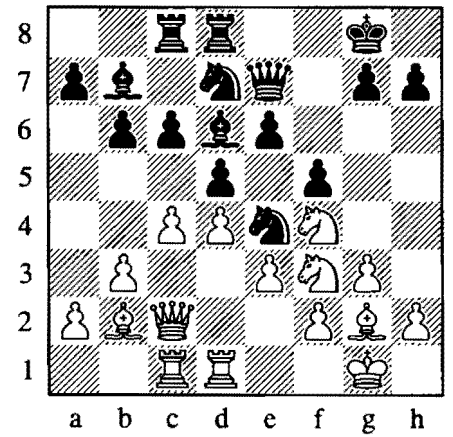
15.♗b2 ♘hf6

Notice how White cannot easily carry out her typical plans. There is no way to expand the queenside or trade dark-squared bishops. Hence, all that is left is keeping an eye on the e5-square with:

16.♘e2 ♕e7 17.♘f4

If 17.♘e5 ♗xe5 18.dxe5 ♘g4 there is no defence for the e5-pawn, though after 19.a4!? ♘gxe5 20.♗a3 ♘c5 21.a5 White should have enough compensation to equalize.

17...♖fd8 18.♖ac1 ♘e4



19.♘d3 ♗b8

There is no hurry to break in the centre, as White does not have a clear-cut plan to make use of the *weak* e5-square.

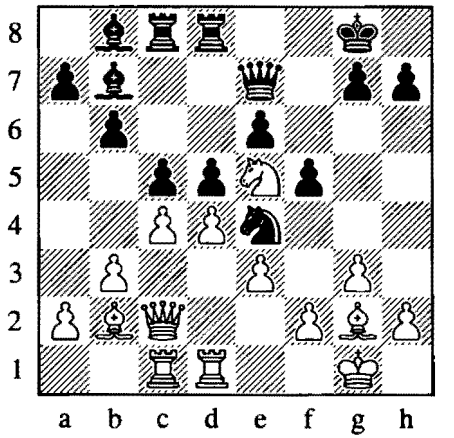
Another option was 19...c5!? 20.dxc5 ♘dxc5 21.♘de5 ♘d7 with level chances.

20.♘fe5

If 20.c5 bxc5 (the waiting move 20...♕f7!? is interesting too) 21.♘xc5 ♘exc5 22.dxc5 ♖f8 23.b4 e5 yields a complex position with mutual chances.

20...♘xe5 21.♘xe5 c5!

Black's pieces are ideally placed for this break, which undermines White's control of the e5-square.



22.♕e2

Chances are equal after 22.cxd5 ♗xd5 23.♕e2 cxd4 24.♗xd4.

22...cxd4 23.exd4?!

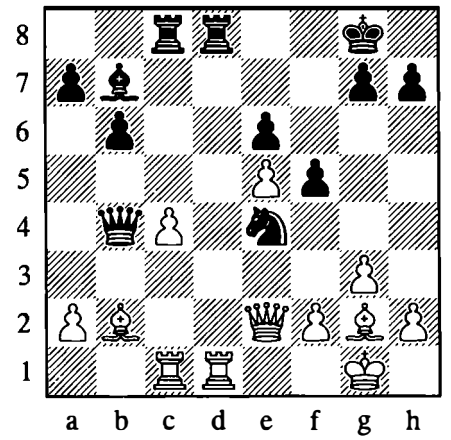
Allowing Black to create weaknesses in White's pawn structure.

Better was 23.♗xd4 dxc4 24.♘xc4 with level chances.

23...♗xe5! 24.dxe5 dxc4 25.bxc4

Or 25.♖xc4 ♖xd1† 26.♕xd1 ♖xc4 27.bxc4 h6! followed by ...♕c5 with a small edge.

25...♕b4!



White's strategy has proved to be a complete failure, and she must begin to fight for equality since:

1 The e5-square is no longer weak.
2. Black's light-squared bishop is no longer bad.
3. White's c4-pawn is a permanent weakness.

26.♗d4 ♖d7

More precise was 26...h6! making a bolthole for Black's king, while keeping the central pressure: 27.♕c2 ♖d7 White is in trouble since there is no ideal defence against ...♖dc7 or ...♖cd8. For example: 28.♕b3? (or 28.♗e3 ♖xd1† 29.♕xd1 ♖xc4) 28...♕xb3 29.axb3 ♖cd8–+

27.♗e3 ♖cd8 28.♖xd7 ♖xd7 29.♕e1

Black has only a microscopic advantage after 29.♕c2 h6 30.♕b3 ♕e7 since White's pawns are somewhat vulnerable.

29...♕a4 30.♕e2 ♕a3

White is under some pressure, and now collapses unexpectedly after:

31.♗xe4?

Better was 31.♕c2 h6 32.♖b1 ♗c6 when Black has only a tiny edge.

31...♗xe4∓

This bad bishop now turns into a powerful attacking piece.

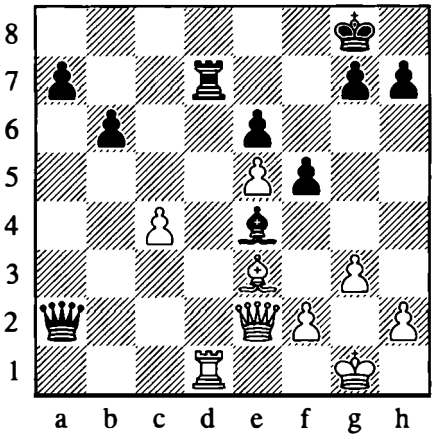
32.♖d1?

A tactical mistake under pressure.

If 32.c5 bxc5 33.♖xc5 h6!? threatening ...♕xa2, and after 34.f3 ♗b1∓ White is in trouble.

32...♕xa2!

Black is now winning, due to his attacking chances and material advantage.



33.♕e1

Obviously not: 33.♕xa2?? ♖xd1#

33...♖d3 34.♖xd3 ♗xd3 35.c5 bxc5 36.♗xc5 ♗e4 37.♕d1 ♗d5 38.f3 a5

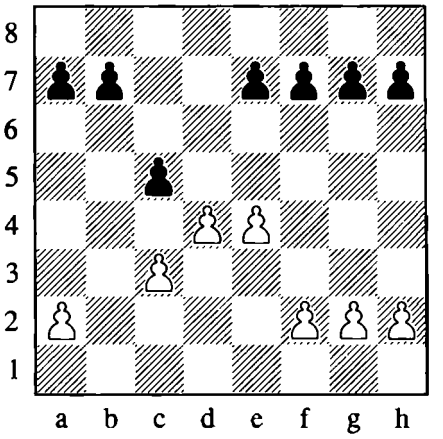
The a-pawn is decisive, and later **Black won**.

Final remarks

1. A crucial factor in Black's choosing to pursue the plan ...c6-c5 was that his pieces were already well arranged for it. Black probably would not have started that plan from scratch had other plans been readily available.
2. It should be noted that it was a good decision for Black to convert the game into a Stonewall on move 12, as White did not have a clear way to execute any of her plans. The e5-square was hardly accessible and it was impossible to expand the queenside.

Chapter 7

Grünfeld Centre



The structure studied in this chapter typically arises from the Grünfeld Defence, and occasionally in the Nimzo-Indian Defence, in which case the e7-pawn will be on e6, but this does not affect the essence of the strategy. It rarely occurs with reversed colours unless White is deliberately attempting to play a Grünfeld with an extra tempo. Although there is central tension in the position presented, the most likely outcome is that pawns will be traded on d4, after which the c-file will be open, leaving White with a central pawn majority and Black with a queenside pawn majority. This will be a central theme across all positions of this type. Let's outline plans for each side:

White's plans

1. Create a central passed pawn with d4-d5, dominate the centre, gain space.
2. Create a kingside attack, which will probably include the moves h2-h4-h5 and e4-e5 to gain control of the f6-square, which is usually weakened when Black develops his bishop on g7.

Black's plans

1. Create a queenside passed pawn, especially after some simplifications.
2. Pressure the centre, place a rook on the d-file and find tactical resources associated with the open position.

In general White will get pretty good middlegame opportunities since he dominates the centre and has a little more space. This advantage disappears rather easily, as the position is open and Black has multiple opportunities to trade off pieces heading into a good endgame. One major factor in this position is the control of the c-file. If White controls the c-file it will be easier for him to expand, to create a passed pawn, to neutralize Black's play. Likewise, if Black controls the open file, White's central or kingside play will face many difficulties. One may say that open files are always important, which is often true. But in this position the open file is even more important than usual – it is essential.

The first three games in this chapter will illustrate the importance of the c-file, and through these examples we will see how White can create a central passed pawn and win the game. In the third game it is Black who creates pressure by controlling the c-file, and eventually obtains a near-winning endgame. The last two games are devoted to the study of White attacking with the e4-e5 advance. In the first of these White's strategy proves successful, while in the second example Black manages to neutralize the threats to obtain a very superior endgame which is won with high class.

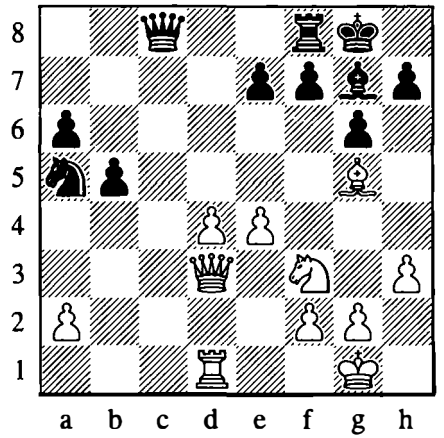
The first example in this chapter is the 17th game from the World Championship match of 1990. This game is annotated in the Mega Database by GMs Ftacnik and Gurevich. I shall fast-forward through the opening to reach the position of interest.

Anatoly Karpov – Garry Kasparov

World Championship, Lyon/New York (17) 1990

Learning objective: This game is a classic illustration of how important it is to possess the c-file in this structure.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗e3 c5 8.♕d2 0–0 9.♘f3 ♗g4 10.♘g5 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘c6 12.h3 ♗d7 13.♖b1 ♖c8 14.♘f3 ♘a5 15.♗d3 ♗e6 16.0–0 ♗c4 17.♖fd1 b5 18.♗g5 a6 19.♖bc1 ♗xd3 20.♖xc8 ♕xc8 21.♕xd3



The reader should examine this position carefully, as there is more than meets the eye. Players of all levels could glance at this position and say, "Chances are level." Even my engine agrees with this evaluation. In practice matters are not that simple at all. Black experiences some difficulties, as the e7-pawn is under attack, the a6-pawn is vulnerable, and White intends to take control of the c-file. Black could solve his problems by playing two moves in a row: ...♕d7 and ...♘c4 momentarily blocking the c-file. Having only one move, Kasparov failed to cope with his difficulties, and played:

21...♖e8?!

In the post-mortem, Kasparov referred to this move as a positional blunder, saying that after losing the c-file his position was "completely lost". He probably exaggerated, but the point is clear: fighting for control of the c-file is an essential task in this kind of position.

A better choice was 21...♘c4! 22.♗xe7 ♖e8 (but not 22...♘b2? 23.♕d2 ♘xd1 24.♗xf8 winning a pawn) 23.♗a3 (23.♗g5? ♘b2–+) 23...♘xa3 24.♕xa3 ♖xe4 25.d5 when White's position is somewhat easier to play, but Black should be able to hold with care.

Another option was 21...♕b7 22.♕a3 ♘c4 23.♕xe7 ♕xe7 24.♗xe7 ♖e8 25.♗c5 ♜xe4 with level chances, though Black will need to be careful after 26.d5!?.

Black loses a pawn after 21...♕d7? 22.♕a3 ♘c4 23.♕xa6.

22.♖c1±

A logical decision, taking control of the essential c-file.

22...♕b7

Gurevich suggested 22...♕d7 but after 23.♕a3 ♘c4 24.♕xa6 ♗xd4 25.♘xd4 ♕xd4 26.♕xb5 ♘d6 27.♕d7 ♕xe4 28.a4± Black still experiences some problems due to the passed a-pawn.

Instead 22...♕e6!? (attacking the a2-pawn) 23.d5 ♕d6 gives Black an inferior yet playable position.

23.d5

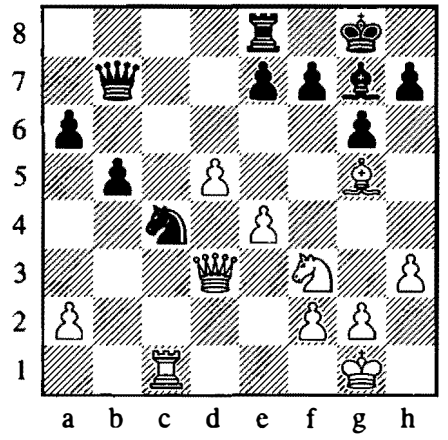
Gaining control of the c6-square and advancing the central majority hoping to create a passed pawn in the near future.

23...♘c4

Blocking the c-file, hoping to continue with ...♖c8 equalizing.

After 23...h6, GM Ftacnik suggests 24.♗f4 ♘c4 25.♘d2 g5 26.♗g3 ♘xd2 27.♖c7!± when this key intermediate move secures the control of the c-file.

Unfortunately for Black, he cannot dispute the c-file with 23...♖c8? because of 24.♖xc8† ♕xc8 25.♗xe7 winning a pawn and the game.



24.♘d2!

A good decision, as any other move allows Black to equalize with 24...♖c8.

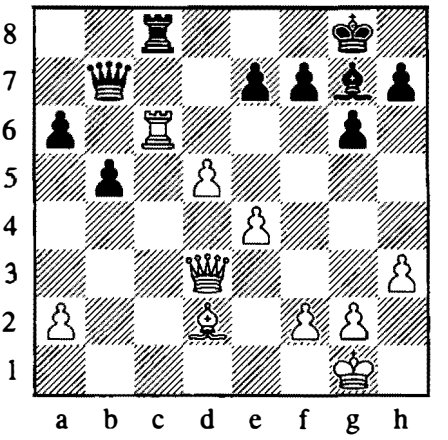
24...♘xd2 25.♗xd2 ♖c8?!

This equalizing try does not work.

A better defence was 25...♗e5 though Black experiences definite problems after 26.♖c6 gaining control of the c-file.

26.♖c6!±

This is the move Kasparov missed; now the c-file belongs to White, and the rest of the game is an instructive display of Karpovian technique.



26...♗e5

Covering the c7-square.

The point is that:

26...♖xc6?

Fails to:

27.dxc6 ♕c7

The c6-pawn is untouchable: 27...♕xc6?? 28.♕d8† ♗f8 29.♗h6 followed by ♕xf8#.

Or: 27...♕b8 28.♕d7 ♗e5 29.♗a5+–

28.♕d7 ♗e5 29.♗h6!

Threatening ♕e8#.

29...♕xd7 30.cxd7 ♗c7 31.e5!+–

A very nice-looking position, Black is trapped in a cage, and there is nothing to do against White's king marching to the queenside decisively. For example, 31...f6?! 32.e6 or 31...e6 32.♗g5.

27.♗c3!

A nice touch! Karpov understands his advantage resides in the control of the c-file, hence bishops are only "accessory pieces" which should be exchanged to create a bigger imbalance of forces.

27...♗b8

If 27...♗xc3 28.♕xc3 ♖e8 (But not 28...♖xc6?! 29.dxc6 ♕c7 since the endgame is lost, for example: 30.h4! Threatening h5-h6. 30...h5 31.e5 ♔f8 32.♕c5 ♔e8 33.g3 ♔f8 34.♕d5 ♔e8 35.e6) 29.a3± With a big advantage due

to the control of the c-file and Black's lack of counterplay. A possible continuation is 29...♕a8 30.♕c5 ♕b8 31.♖c7 ♕d8 32.e5 which is nearly winning for White.

28.♕d4

Threatening ♕g7#.

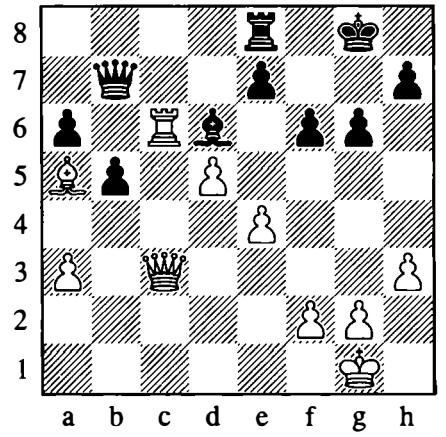
28...f6 29.♗a5

29.♕c5!? was also strong.

29...♗d6

Black loses the bishop after 29...♖xc6? 30.dxc6 ♕xc6 31.♕d8† ♔f7 32.♕xb8.

30.♕c3 ♖e8 31.a3



Karpov dominates the position by controlling the c-file. Now he improves his position a little before taking decisive action.

31...♔g7 32.g3

A potential threat is f2-f4.

32...♗e5 33.♕c5 h5?

Making White's task easier. A better defence was: 33...♗d6 34.♕c1 ♕d7 35.♔g2 ♖a8 36.f4!?±

34.♗c7!

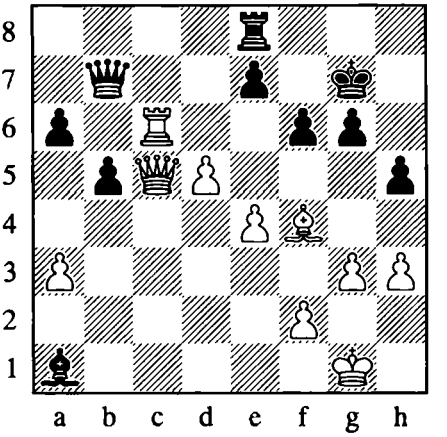
Offering to trade bishops in order to gain control of the c7-square.

34...♗a1

Of course not 34...♗xc7? 35.♖xc7 ♕a8 36.♖xe7†.

35.♗f4+–

Now White will invade the seventh rank and win the game easily.



35...♕d7 36.♖c7 ♕d8

Not 36...♕xh3? 37.♖xe7† ♖xe7 38.♕xe7† ♔g8 39.♗h6 forcing checkmate.

37.d6 g5 38.d7 ♖f8

38...gxf4? fails to 39.dxe8=♕ ♕xe8 40.♖xe7†.

39.♗d2 ♗e5 40.♖b7

Black resigns as he cannot prevent ♕c6, ♗e3-b6.

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black was left without counterplay after losing the c-file on move 22.
2. The entrance of the rook by 26.♖c6 aggravated Black's situation very much, as the rook pressures a6 and allows the doubling of the major pieces with ♕c2.
3. The idea of trading bishops was excellent, in order to clear the entry point c7, without which White cannot make much progress.

Wesley So – Mauricio Flores Rios

Princeton 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game is a modern execution of the ideas we studied in the previous game.
2. Once again, the c-file, the entrance on the c6-square, and the potential for a passed pawn decide the game in White's favour.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.e4 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 c5 8.♖b1 0–0 9.♗e2 b6

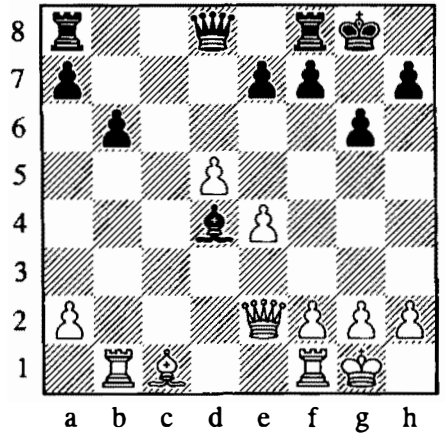
More common is 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 ♕a5† 11.♗d2 ♕xa2 with sharp theoretical complications.

10.0–0 ♗b7 11.♕d3 cxd4?!

The beginning of a mistaken plan. I somehow wanted to play safe in this game by trading several pieces early on, and hoping for an easy draw. Let's see what happened.

A better alternative was the standard 11...e6 12.♗g5 ♕c7 13.♕e3 ♘d7 14.e5 with a typical Grünfeld position which has occurred in over 50 games.

12.cxd4 ♗a6 13.♕e3 ♗xe2 14.♕xe2 ♘c6 15.d5 ♘d4 16.♘xd4 ♗xd4



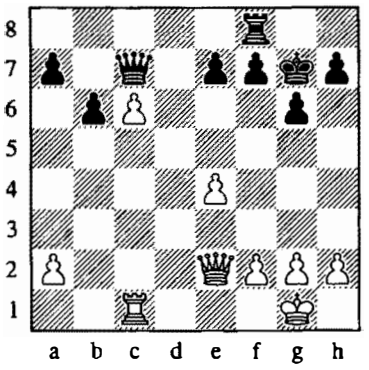
And here I was. After trading three minor pieces I thought my position was very close to equal, and heading for a relatively easy draw. There is great similarity between this position and the previous game, but unfortunately for me, I was unfamiliar with that game at the time, hence I was in unknown territory from a strategic perspective and I did not yet know how bad my position was.

The reader should carefully examine this position and appreciate Black's difficulties. First, one of White's main plans in this pawn structure is the creation of a passed pawn on the d-file, which Wesley is not very far from, since his d-pawn has already reached d5. Second, the c6-square is weakened, which probably will help White gain control of the c-file, just as in the previous game. Finally, Black's counterplay is often based on advancing his majority on the queenside, but we know this is not going to happen soon enough; thus Black is just playing a waiting game, hoping to survive. Overall, this position is probably just a slight advantage for White, but it is extremely difficult for Black to play, as there is not a clear-cut plan, and there are many things to worry about.

17.♖d1

Gaining a tempo to support the potential e4-e5 and d5-d6.

An interesting alternative is: 17.♗h6!? ♗g7 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♖bc1 ♖c8 20.♖c6! Just as in the previous game. 20...♖xc6 21.dxc6 ♕c7 22.♖c1±



With perfect play, it is impossible to say if this is a forced win or just a draw. But White can comfortably play for a win for as long as he wants to, and should expect to score about 80% of the points, as passive defence is always difficult. As an example, I offer this variation: 22...♖d8 23.e5 e6 24.g3 ♖c8 25.h4 ♖d8 26.♕e3 ♖c8 27.♕d4 ♖d8 28.♕d6! ♖xd6? (or 28...♖c8 29.♔g2±) 29.exd6 ♕xd6 30.c7+–

17...♗g7

Or 17...♗e5 18.♗h6 (18.f4?! does not work so well after 18...♗d6 19.e5 ♗c5† 20.♔h1 ♕d7 followed by ...♕f5 where Black is doing fine) 18...♖e8 19.♖bc1± and again, it is similar to the previous game.

The alternative 17...♗c5?! blocking the c-file can be met by 18.♗h6 ♖e8 19.e5 when White has good attacking prospects, aside from the potential threat of creating a central passed pawn.

18.♗a3±

Preparing White's two main ideas: the creation of a passed pawn with e4-e5 and d5-d6, and the control of the c-file with ♖b1-c1-c6. Black cannot prevent both.

18...♗e5

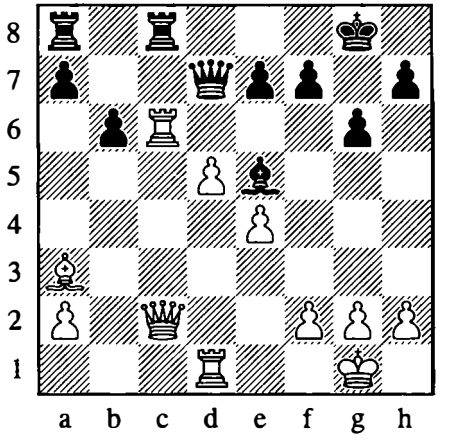
At this point I started to realize that I was in serious trouble, since I had lost the c-file.

In particular, I was disappointed to realize that after 18...♕d7 19.e5 Black has nothing to do other than wait, while White has a pleasant choice between the strong breaks e5-e6 and d5-d6. 19...♖fe8 20.♕e4 ♖ac8 21.g3!? (preparing f2-f4 gaining more space) 21...♖c3 22.♗b2 ♖c5 23.♖bc1 Black is inferior, and must always watch out for tactical shots. For example 23...♖ec8? runs into: 24.e6! fxe6 (better is 24...♕d6±) 25.dxe6 And now 25...♕c6? loses after 26.♖xc5 bxc5 27.♖d8†! winning the queen, or mating after 27...♗f8 28.♕e5.

19.♖bc1 ♕d7 20.♖c6

Following Karpov's model, White takes control of the c-file. The machine only gives a small advantage to White, but I can testify this feels a lot worse during a live game, particularly since I did not know how to wait without further damaging my position.

20...♖fc8 21.♕c2



21...e6?!

This is just a sign of desperation, damaging my own position by helping White obtain a passed pawn on the d-file.

No good is 21...♖xc6? 22.dxc6 ♕e8 23.♖d7 when the c6-pawn and the seventh-rank invasion decide the game.

It was better to wait with 21...♖ab8 but after 22.g3 Black's position is unpleasant, facing the potential threat f2-f4 and e4-e5. A possible continuation is 22...b5 23.♗b4 ♕d8 24.f4 ♗g7 25.e5± followed by e5-e6 or d5-d6 to create a passed pawn.

22.g3 exd5 23.exd5 h5?

Hoping for some miraculous counterplay? My dreams were crushed too soon after the strong:

24.♖e1!±

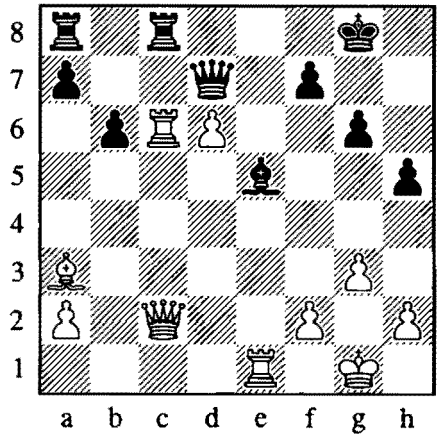
The bishop on e5 suddenly becomes vulnerable.

24...♖e8

If 24...♗g7 25.♖e7 ♕g4 26.d6 the passed d-pawn decides the game.

25.d6 ♖ec8?

I played this instantly as I was already under some time pressure.



26.♖c7!

I completely missed this nice tactical blow which gives White a decisive advantage.

I was hoping for 26.♖xc8†? ♖xc8 27.♕e4 ♗f6 when Black's position seems defendable, though still preferable for White.

26...♖xc7 27.dxc7 ♕xc7

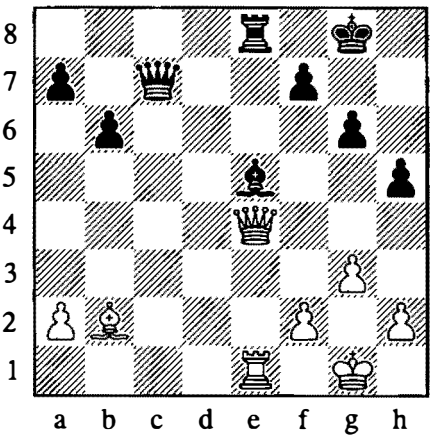
Not 27...♗xc7? 28.♖e7 and White wins at once.

28.♕e4

Attacking the rook and the bishop.

28...♖e8 29.♗b2!

This is the point. Black is now forced to give up an exchange obtaining a lost position.



29...♗xb2

Even worse is: 29...f6? 30.♕xg6† ♔f8 (30...♕g7? 31.♕xe8†) 31.♗a3†+–

30.♕xe8† ♔g7 31.♖e7 ♕c1† 32.♔g2 ♕c4 33.♖xa7 ♕d5†

More stubborn was 33...h4!?.

34.f3 ♕c4 35.♕e4

White is a full exchange up and my counterplay is under control. The rest is simple.

35...♕c8 36.♖b7 h4 37.gxh4 ♗f6 38.♕d5 ♕e8 39.♕c4 b5 40.♖xb5 ♕d7 41.♖d5 ♕e6 42.♖c5 ♕e3 43.♖c7 ♔h6 44.♕c1

1–0

Final remarks

1. The message of this game is very similar to the previous one. In essence, the c-file plays a crucial role in this type of structure. Without it, Black will be limited to a very difficult, passive defence.
2. Most importantly, this game illustrates the importance of studying model games for each structure, as we do in this book. Had I known the Karpov – Kasparov game beforehand, I certainly would have known how to play this position type, and I would have known what variations to avoid.

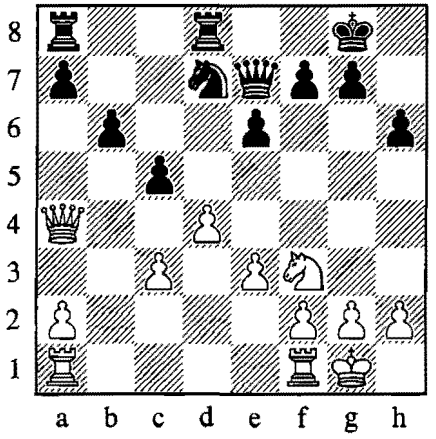
Holden Hernandez – George Meier

Lubbock 2013

Learning objectives:
1. We can reach a Grünfeld type structure from a completely different opening.
2. Once again, this game illustrates the importance of the c-file, but now the file is in Black's possession.

I present the opening moves, but do not analyze them as they are irrelevant for our purposes.

1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 h6 6.♗h4 0–0 7.♗e2 b6 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♗b5 ♗b7 12.♕a4 ♖fd8 13.♗c6 ♗xc6 14.♕xc6 ♘b4 15.♕a4 ♘d5 16.♘c3 ♘xc3 17.bxc3 c5



We reach a critical moment in the game, as White has to determine what pawn structure to play.

18.e4?

This move is a serious misjudgement, converting the game into a Grünfeld-type position under unfavourable circumstances. The reader should compare this position to the previous two games and understand why White's move is a mistake. In these games, particularly in So – Flores, White had two strong plans in hand: creating a passed pawn on the d-file, and controlling the c-file with his major pieces. In this position Black is well prepared to meet both plans, and it is White who does not have the time to fight for the c-file, due to the vulnerability of his central pawns.

A sound decision was 18.♖fd1 ♘f6 19.♖ac1 with level chances.

Or 18.c4!? cxd4 19.exd4 with a hanging pawns structure, although the central pawns might become vulnerable as the game is already simplified.

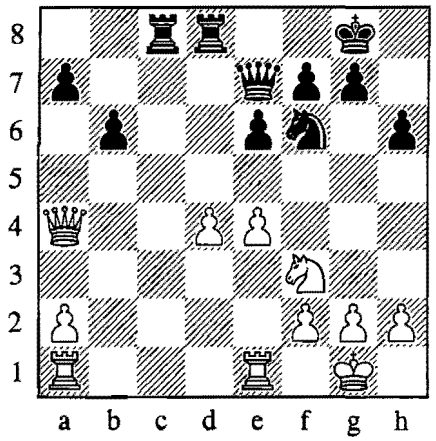
18...♘f6 19.♖fe1

19.♕c2 is of no help after 19...cxd4 20.cxd4 ♖ac8 21.♕e2 ♕b7 22.♖fe1 ♖c7!?∓ with a pleasant advantage for Black.

The advance 19.e5? gives a big advantage to Black after 19...♘d5 20.♖ac1 ♖ac8∓ since there is no time for 21.♘d2?! (intending to follow with ♘e4-d6) because of 21...cxd4 22.cxd4 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♘f4! with the decisive threats ...♖xd4 and ...♕g5. For example: 24.♖e1 ♕g5 25.g3 ♘h3† 26.♔g2 ♕xd2–+

19...cxd4 20.cxd4 ♖ac8∓

Gaining control of the essential c-file! White is simply worse, as none of his typical plans work here.



21.♕a6?!

The queen is not particularly helpful on this square, but it at least prevents Black from playing ...♕b7 pressuring the e4-pawn.

If 21.♕b3 ♕b7 (threatening ...♘xe4) 22.♕d3 ♕c6 Black dominates the game due to the c-file invasions ...♕a4 and ...♖c2, or simply ...♕c2.

White cannot fight for the c-file with 21.♖ac1? as he loses a pawn after 21...♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♘xe4.

A better defence was 21.♖e2 protecting his second rank. After 21...♖c3 22.♖ae1 ♕d7!? 23.♕xd7 ♖xd7∓ White has to defend an inferior endgame.

21...♖c2

Black is certainly not going to miss a chance to invade the seventh rank.

22.h3 ♖dc8 23.♖ad1

Or 23.♖e2 ♖8c3 24.♖xc2 ♖xc2 25.♕d3 ♕c7∓ when White's pieces are trapped in a cage.

If 23.a4 attempting to simplify the queenside, Black replies 23...♕d7! 24.a5 b5∓ creating a dangerous passed pawn.

23...♖8c4

Even stronger was 23...♖8c3 threatening ...♖a3 then ...♖axa2 with a winning position, and after 24.♖d3 (or 24.♖e2 ♕c7 25.♖xc2 ♖xc2∓) 24...♖xd3 25.♕xd3 ♖xa2∓ White has no compensation for the pawn.

24.♘e5 ♖c7 25.d5?

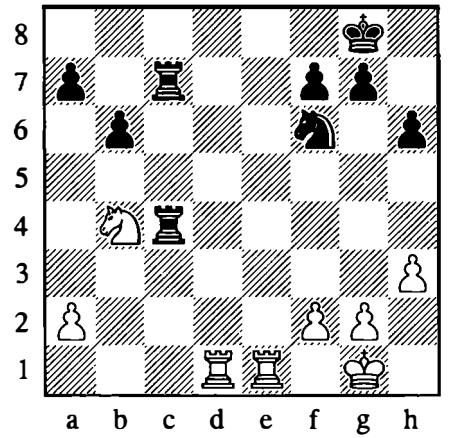
Desperation. White was probably under time pressure. Generally, attempting to create a passed pawn without controlling the position is just doomed to fail.

25.♖e2 was necessary, though after 25...♖2c3!? White's defence requires great accuracy. For example the natural 26.♘f3? runs into 26...♖xf3! 27.gxf3 ♘h5 with a decisive attack; or simply waiting with 26.♔h1? is refuted by 26...♕b4!∓ threatening ...♖a3 trapping White's queen. The best defence is 26.♖ee1!∓.

25...exd5 26.exd5 ♕c5

Simple and effective; White is losing a pawn because of the double threat ...♘xd5 and ...♕xf2 mating.

27.♘d3 ♕xd5 28.♘b4 ♕c4! 29.♕xc4 ♖2xc4∓



Black is nearly winning, and the rest of the game is an exemplary endgame.

30.♖d8† ♔h7 31.♘d5 ♘xd5 32.♖xd5 ♖c1 33.♖dd1 ♖xd1 34.♖xd1 ♔g6

Black's king is coming to the game much sooner than White's, making the defensive task nearly impossible.

35.♖d3 ♔f6 36.g4 ♔e6 37.♔g2 ♖d7 38.♖c3 ♖d4

Improving the rook from passive to active.

39.♔f3

If 39.♖a3 a5 40.♖b3 ♖b4! 41.♖e3† (of course not 41.♖xb4?? axb4 42.♔f3 ♔d5 43.♔e3 ♔c4 and the pawn endgame is won) 41...♔d6 when Black's king is just too close to the queenside.

39...♖a4 40.a3 g6

This move is a small improvement in the position. Black is preparing to transfer his king

to the queenside, after which White will need an extra tempo to capture the f- and g-pawns, say ♖xf7-g7xg6.

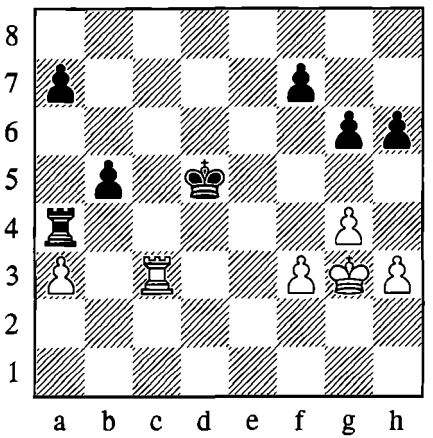
41.♔g3 b5 42.f3?!

This only makes things easier, blocking the way for White's king.

A more stubborn defence was 42.♔f3 keeping an eye on the queenside, though after 42...a5 43.♔e2 ♔d6 44.♔d2 ♖d4†!? White's position seems hopeless, as he cannot protect both flanks from Black's multiple threats.

42...♔d5

Black's king marches to the queenside, and the position is just lost.



43.h4 a5 44.♖c7 ♖xa3 45.♖xf7 b4 46.♖b7 b3

White resigns as he cannot prevent the promotion of the pawns.

0–1

Final remarks

1. White's biggest mistake in this game was going into a Grünfeld structure without calculating whether he could fight for the c-file or not.
2. Black's control of the c-file kept White under serious pressure and lacking counterplay, thus provoking the mistake 25.d5? which cost a pawn and the game.

M. Emilian Parligras – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Aix-les-Bains 2011

Learning objective: This game provides an example for an ideal execution of the e4-e5 advance, as well as the subsequent kingside attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗e3 c5 8.♕d2 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♘c6 10.♖d1 0–0 11.♘f3 ♗g4 12.♗e2 ♖c8 13.0–0

So far we have been following a well-known theoretical line, and now Black decided to deviate with:

13...♗xf3

More common is 13...♕a5 when pretty much all GM-level games have finished in a draw, so it is understandable for Nepomniachtchi to have chosen differently, although his strategy ultimately backfired...

14.♗xf3 ♘a5

Aiming to play ...♘c4xe3.

An interesting option was 14...e5!? 15.d5 ♘d4 16.♖c1! preparing ♗e2 with a small advantage (but not 16.♗e2?? ♖c2–+) 16...♘xf3† 17.gxf3± when White's king is reasonably safe, while the d5-pawn is strong.

15.♗g5!

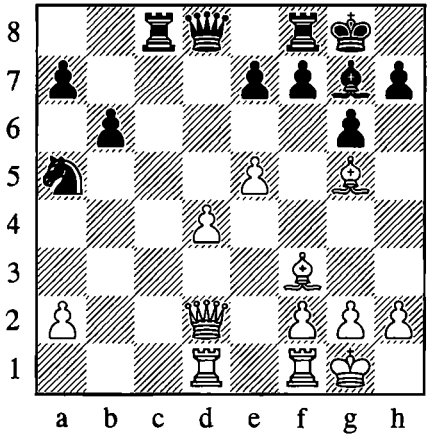
Suddenly Black's knight will not have much to do on c4.

Probably Nepomniachtchi was hoping for 15.♗e2 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4 17.♖c1 b5 when Black had reasonable chances to play for a win, as in the game Praszak – Eljanov, Polanica Zdroj 1999.

15...b6 16.e5!

A good positional decision. Generally speaking, the e4-e5 advance is double-edged in the Grünfeld structure. On the positive side, it restricts the action of the g7-bishop and creates

some attacking chances on the kingside. On the negative side, it may permanently weaken the d5 square, and it often gives up the possibility of creating a passed d-pawn, as Black can simply neutralize the majority with the standard ...e7-e6. This position is different, and the key is the lack of Black's light-squared bishop and the misplacement of Black's knight, many moves away from the d5-square.



16...♕d7

The imprecise 16...♘c4?! is met by 17.♕b4! ♖c7 (or 17...♖e8 18.♗b7! ♖c7 19.♗a6 ♘a5 20.♗b5 ♖f8 21.♖c1±) 18.♗e2 ♘a5 19.♖c1± and the e7-pawn is a serious target.

17.♖fe1 ♘c4 18.♕e2 e6

A necessary move. It weakens the f6-square somewhat, but White was threatening 19.♗g4 e6 20.d5!.

For example, the careless 18...b5? loses to: 19.♗g4! e6 20.d5 ♕e8 21.dxe6 fxe6 22.♖d6! This is the key. 22...♘xd6 23.exd6 ♔h8 24.♗xe6

19.h4

A familiar plan, intending to create more weaknesses around Black's king.

19...h6?!

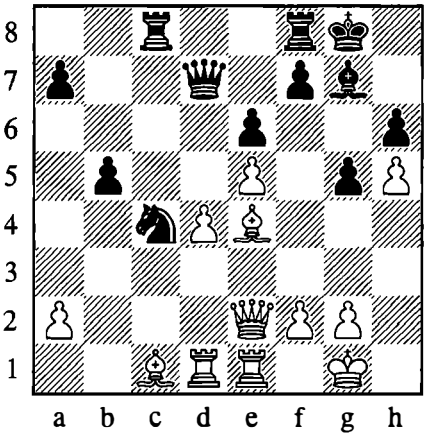
This weakens the position needlessly.

Krasenkow suggests the variation 19...b5!? 20.h5 ♘b6 21.h6 ♗h8 22.♕d2 ♖c4 23.♕f4 ♘d5 24.♗xd5 exd5 25.♗f6?! ♕e6 when Black is holding okay, but instead 25.♖e3!?± allows White to maintain some pressure.

20.♗c1 b5

If 20...h5? 21.g4! Black is in serious trouble after 21...hxg4 22.♗e4! when the simple ♕xg4 followed by h4-h5 blows up Black's castled position: 22...♖fd8 23.♕xg4 ♕b5 (or 23...♔f8 24.h5 gxh5 25.♕xh5+–) 24.♗g5 ♖d7 25.h5 With a winning attack.

21.h5 g5 22.♗e4



White's position is very promising. He may proceed with either f2-f4 opening up the kingside, or ♗b1 planning ♕c2-h7#.

22...♘b6?!

This makes things clearer for White.

If 22...♖fd8 23.f4 gxf4 24.♗xf4± and Black's position is quite fragile.

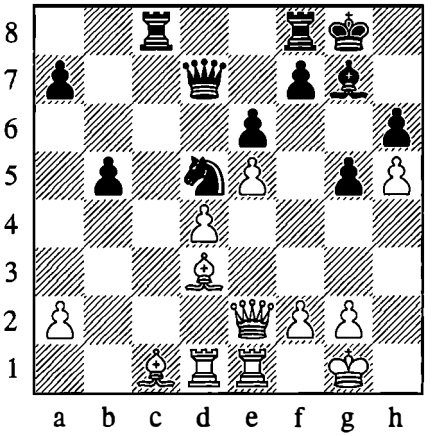
A better defence was 22...a6!? 23.♗b1 (another option is 23.♕g4!? preparing f2-f4) 23...f5 24.exf6 ♖xf6 25.a4± with a generally pleasant position for White.

23.♗d3

With the double threat ♗xb5 and ♕e4-h7#, when there is nothing better than giving up a pawn with:

23...♘d5

If 23...b4?! White gains a very powerful attack after: 24.♕e4 f5 (or 24...♖fd8 25.♗xg5! hxg5 26.h6 ♗xh6 27.♕h7† ♔f8 28.♕xh6† ♔e8 29.♕xg5±) 25.exf6 ♖xf6 26.♕h7† ♔f8 27.d5!+– Opening up lines with a winning position, for example: 27...♘xd5 28.♗b2 ♖f7 (or 28...♘c3 29.♗a6!+–) 29.♗xg7† ♖xg7 30.♕xh6+–



24.♗xb5 ♕e7 25.♗d2

White is simply a pawn up, and the rest of the game is not so relevant to us, thus I leave it with only sparse comments.

25...f5 26.exf6 ♖xf6 27.♗c4 ♕f7 28.♗xd5!?

Keeping things simple and clear, even at the cost of decreasing the advantage somewhat.

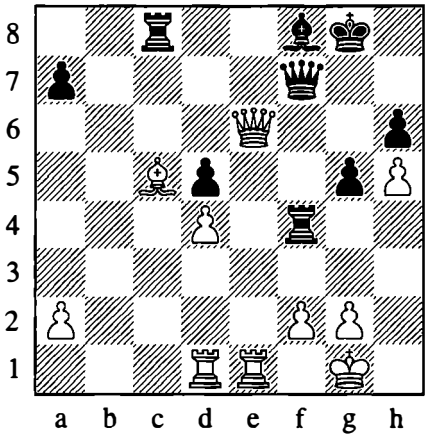
An option was 28.♗d3! with a near-decisive advantage.

28...exd5 29.♗b4 ♖f4 30.♗c5 ♗f8?

A better defence was: 30...♖e4!±

31.♕e6

More potent was 31.♕a6! ♖c7 32.♗xf8 ♕xf8 33.♕g6† ♖g7 34.♕c6 winning another pawn, and the game.



31...♕xe6 32.♖xe6 ♔f7 33.♖a6 ♗xc5 34.dxc5 ♖xc5 35.♖xh6 ♖a4 36.♖b1+–

The invasion on the seventh rank decides the game.

36...d4 37.♖b7† ♔g8 38.♖g6† ♔h8 39.♖h6† ♔g8 40.♖d6 ♖c8 41.h6 d3 42.g3

But not: 42.♖g7† ♔h8 43.♖dd7? ♖c1† 44.♔h2 ♖h4† 45.♔g3 ♖xh6±

The text move makes a space on g2 for the king, and covers the h4-square, which forced Black to resign. For example, 42...♖xa2?? 43.♖g7† ♔h8 (43...♔f8 44.♖f6† ♔e8 45.h7 mating) 44.♖dd7 threatening mate in three.

1–0

Final remarks

1. The key to this game was the timely e4-e5 advance, which gave White all the benefits but none of the drawbacks of this move.
2. The disadvantage in placing a knight on a5 is that after e4-e5 it takes many moves to reach the d5-square. By the time this knight reached d5, Black's camp was already far too weakened.

Yuri Vovk – Andrei Volokitin

Kiev 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates how Black may neutralize White's kingside attack after e4-e5 has been played.
2. After Black neutralizes such an attack, we arrive in a superior endgame which illustrates the advantage of having a remote pawn majority.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗c4 c5 8.♘e2 ♘c6 9.♗e3 0–0 10.0–0 ♘a5 11.♗d3 b6 12.♖c1

So far we have been following theory quite closely, and now:

12...e6!?

This is somewhat rare, but still a good move and a standard one in Black's set-up.

More common is 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 e6 14.♕d2 ♗b7 with typical Grünfeld play.

12...e5!? is also possible.

13.♕d2

If 13.dxc5 Black is often ready to play with compensation for the pawn after 13...♕c7! 14.cxb6 axb6 with level chances, since the c3- and a2-pawns are rather weak. For example, 15.♖b1 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♕xc4 17.♖xb6?! (better is 17.♖b4 ♕xa2=) 17...♕xe4!? with slightly better chances for Black.

13...♗b7 14.♗g5

Again, Black is fine after 14.dxc5 ♕c7 15.cxb6 axb6.

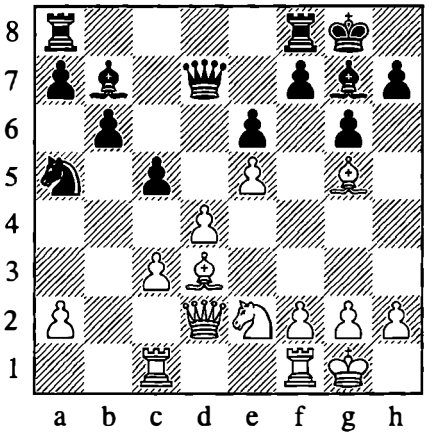
Another option was 14.♖fd1 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♕d7 when the position is quite flexible. A possible continuation is 16.♗h6 ♗xh6 17.♕xh6 ♖ac8 18.h4 ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♘c6!? with a balanced game.

14...♕d6 15.e5!?

A double-edged decision that is typical in this position.

Again the conservative 15.♖fd1 was possible, with level chances.

15...♕d7



This is a critical position in the game. By advancing e4-e5, White has created some attacking prospects on the kingside, while at same time weakening the d5-square and losing the option of creating a passed pawn on the d-file. The reader should compare this position to the previous game, and realize that Black is much better prepared to meet this advance in this position, since he does have a light-squared bishop to create counterplay down the a8-h1 diagonal. Overall, chances are approximately balanced.

16.♕e3

Preparing the manoeuvre ♘g3-e4-f6. This plan is reasonable, but somewhat slow.

An alternative was 16.h4 ♖fc8 17.h5 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♘c6 (if 19...♖c8?! 20.♖xc8† ♕xc8 21.♗f6± and Black experiences some problems) 20.♗b1 (but not 20.♗e4? ♘xd4!) 20...♖c8 21.♖c3 ♘e7!? with level chances.

Or 16.♗f6 cxd4 (but not 16...♗xf6?! 17.exf6 with the threat ♕h6-g7#) 17.cxd4 ♖ac8 18.h4!? with a balanced game.

16...♖ac8 17.♘g3 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♘c6!

Attacking the d4-pawn, preventing White from completing the plan with ♘e4-f6, and manoeuvring the knight to d5 via b4.

If 19...♖c8?! then 20.♖xc8† ♕xc8 21.♘e4± followed by ♘f6 with the preferable position.

20.♗e4

But not: 20.♘e4? ♕xd4! (if 20...♘xd4?! 21.♘f6† ♗xf6 22.♗xf6 ♕d5 23.f3 and Black's position looks scary) 21.♕xd4 ♘xd4∓

20...♖c8 21.h4 ♘b4

Trading light-squared bishops and heading to the key d5-square.

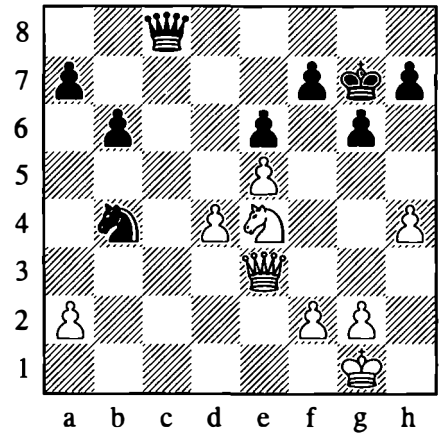
22.♖xc8† ♕xc8 23.♗f6

If 23.♗xb7 ♕xb7 24.♘e4 ♘d5 we reach a position with similar characteristics to the game, a possible continuation being 25.♕d2 ♕c6 26.h5 a5!? when I feel only Black may play for a win, but White should be able to hold due to his kingside predominance.

23...♗xe4 24.♗xg7 ♔xg7

There is no point in gaining a pawn with 24...♗xg2?! because of 25.♗h6! and now it is Black who must play for a draw due to the strong threats against his king.

25.♘xe4



The position has been simplified and White's plan e4-e5 has only half worked, as Black seems to have enough resources to defend. Still, White's chances should not be underestimated, as there are threats associated with h4-h5-h6, ♕f3-f6, ♘d6 etc.

25...♘d5

The most precise in my opinion, keeping White's kingside initiative under control, and playing on for the win.

25...♘xa2!?

White forces a draw after:

26.♕f3!

But not: 26.h5?? ♕c1†–+

26...♘b4 27.♘d6 ♕d7 28.♕a8!

Threatening ♘e8 winning; the only defence is:

28...♕c6!

If 28...♘d5? 29.♘e8† ♔h6 30.g4 when Black is helpless against the checkmate threats. Say, after: 30...♕e7 (30...b5 31.♘f6 ♘xf6 32.♕f8#) 31.♘f6! ♘xf6 32.exf6 ♕xf6 33.g5†+–

29.♕xa7 ♕c1† 30.♔h2 ♕f4† 31.♔g1 ♕c1†=

With a perpetual check.

26.♘d6

This is not technically a mistake, though it is heading in the wrong direction; White should not swap queens.

A healthier decision was 26.♕d2!? ♕c4 27.h5 with approximately level chances, say after 27...h6 (27...a5?! 28.h6†±) 28.hxg6 fxg6 29.g3 a5 30.♘d6 ♕c3 31.♕d1= when Black cannot easily advance his queenside majority due to potential kingside threats. White should not have trouble securing a draw.

26...♕c3

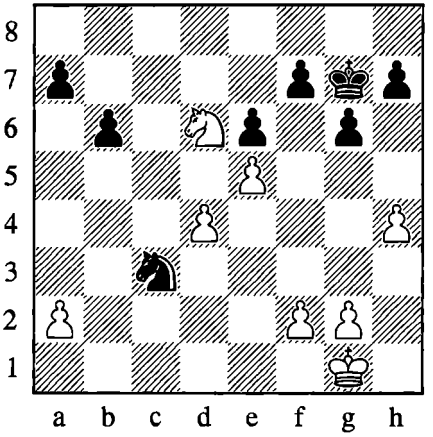
The endgame after 26...♘xe3?! 27.♘xc8 ♘c2 28.♘xa7 ♘xd4 is just a draw as Black has lost his majority on the queenside, and the weak d4-pawn is off the board.

27.♕xc3?

Going into a very difficult endgame.

27.♕e4! was necessary, though Black can play for a win without risk after: 27...b5! (another option is 27...h5!?, but grabbing the pawn with 27...♕a1† 28.♔h2 ♕xa2 only yields a draw after 29.♕f3! f5 30.exf6† ♘xf6 31.♕b7† ♔h6 32.♘f7† ♔g7 33.♘d6† with a perpetual check) For example: 28.♘xb5? (correct is 28.g3 with objective equality, though accuracy is required from White) 28...♕c1† 29.♔h2 ♕b2 30.♘d6 ♕xf2∓

27...♘xc3



The reader should closely examine this endgame, as it reflects Black's strategy in its pure form. The plan was to simplify the position and neutralize the kingside attack in order to go into an endgame with these characteristics. Black will obtain a remote passed pawn, probably on the a-file, while White cannot advance his extra pawn on d4. This position is an example of White's biggest fears when playing the double-edged e4-e5. It is possible that Vovk estimated that he should be able to hold this position, but this task is actually very far from trivial as we shall see.

28.♘c8

The alternative 28.♔f1 ♘xa2 29.♘c8 a5 30.♘xb6 ♘c3 transposes to the game, while 28.a3? loses a pawn after 28...♘e2† 29.♔f1 ♘xd4.

28...a5!

Black chooses to keep the a-pawn, as it is further away from White's king.

If 28...♘xa2? 29.♘xa7 ♘c3 30.♔f1 b5 31.♘c6 White has a much easier time holding the game.

29.♘xb6 ♘xa2 30.♔f1

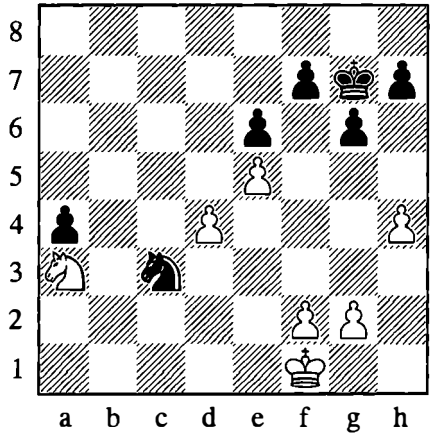
Or 30.♘c4 a4 31.♔f1 ♘c3 32.♘a3 ♔h6 transposing into the game.

30...♘c3 31.♘c4

An alternative was 31.♔e1 a4 32.♔d2 ♘e4† 33.♔c2 (33.♔e3?? a3 and the pawn is unstoppable) 33...a3!? (the alternative is 33...♘xf2) 34.♘c4 ♘xf2 35.♘xa3 ♘e4 36.♔d3 ♘g3∓ winning a pawn.

31...a4 32.♘a3

Preventing ...♘b5 followed by ...a4-a3. White's knight is completely tied to stopping the a-pawn and will not make another move in the game. Since move 27 everything has been pretty much forced, and now Black chooses a strong plan to proceed.



32...♔h6!

Intending to invade the kingside. White faces a very difficult dilemma: should he race to the queenside, attempting to capture the a-pawn, and then try to return to the kingside before it is too late? Or should he wait on the kingside, risking zugzwang?

33.g4?

The decisive mistake, attempting to prevent the invasion, but also giving Black nice tactical resources as we will see.

If 33.♔e1 Black wins neatly with 33...♔h5 34.♔d2 ♘d5 35.g3 ♔g4 36.♔e2 h5 when White will fall into zugzwang after the nice sequence: 37.♘c2 ♔h3 38.♔f3 ♔h2 39.♔e2 (39.g4? ♔h3–+) 39...♔g2 40.♘e1† ♔h3 41.♘c2 ♔g4! 42.♘a3 ♘e7 43.♘c2 ♘f5 Zugzwang! White is forced to give up the f3-square: 44.♔e1 ♔f3 45.♔f1 ♔e4–+

The best defence was 33.g3 g5 34.hxg5† ♔xg5 35.f3! attempting to create a barrier against Black's king, though White's position remains difficult after 35...♘d5!?∓ attempting to follow up with ...♘e7-f5, in addition to a well-timed ...h5-h4.

33...♔g7

The position is already winning for Black, but I will not call it "–+" until it is a little clearer.

34.♔e1

Another attempt was 34.f3 h5 35.♔g2 keeping an eye on the kingside, though after 35...♔f8!? Black's king will march to the queenside decisively. For example: 36.♔f1 ♔e8 37.♔e1 (waiting on the kingside with 37.♔g2 only makes things easier after 37...♔d7 38.♔f2 ♘d5 39.♔e2 ♔c6 40.♔f2 ♔b6 followed by ...♔a5-b4 winning) 37...g5! Winning in similar fashion to the game.

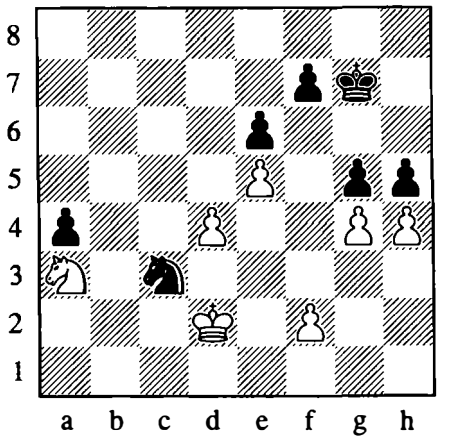
34...h5! 35.♔d2

If 35.gxh5 gxh5 36.♔d2 ♘d5 37.♘c4 ♔g6 Black wins easily after ...♔f5-g4xh4 making the h-pawn passed.

Or 35.g5 ♘d5 36.♔d2 ♘e7 followed by ...♘f5 winning.

35...g5!–+

A very pretty blow, creating a new passed pawn on the h-file.



36.hxg5 h4 37.♔e1

If 37.♔e3 h3 38.♔f3 ♘e2 then White's king is paralyzed, and the game is lost after ...♔g6xg5-h4 and ...♘f4; if 39.♔xe2? h2.

37...h3 38.♔f1 ♔g6 39.f4

39.♔g1 ♔xg5 40.♔h2 ♔xg4 and wins.

39...♘d5 40.♔f2 ♘xf4

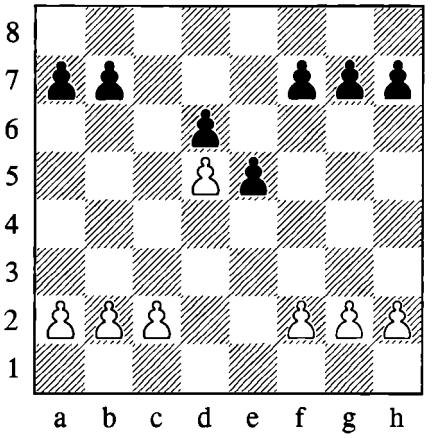
0–1

Final remarks

1. The key moment in the game was after 26...♕c3. White's kingside play had not been completely neutralized (there were at least chances for perpetual check), hence White should have kept the queens on.
2. It is possible that White did not properly evaluate the knight ending. The strength of a remote passed pawn should not be underestimated.
3. The move 28...a5! was very important, choosing to keep a passed a-pawn rather than a b-pawn, because the further away the pawn is from the white king, the harder it is to stop it.
4. Black's creation of a kingside passed pawn with 35...g5! is a beautiful illustration of the concept of creating two fronts, which defined the game.

Chapter 8

Najdorf Type I



The structure studied in this chapter is typical of many Open Sicilians. It arises after White trades pieces on d5, and recaptures with the e-pawn. This frequently occurs in the Najdorf variation, but I should emphasize it is not limited to this variation. For example, we can obtain this structure after the sequence 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♘d5 ♘xd5 8.exd5. This structure deserves careful study as the recapture exd5 dramatically changes the character of the game. Even players of the highest level transform their position with this recapture without properly assessing their chances in the resulting position. This structure provides a natural imbalance and offers interesting chances to both sides. The main plans are:

White's plans

1. Advance the queenside majority with b2-b4 and c2-c4-c5.
2. On some occasions, after Black has played ...f7-f5, it is also possible to place a bishop along the b1-h7 diagonal and play g2-g4 breaking up Black's structure. This plan is rare, but when it works it does so spectacularly well.

Black's plans

1. Expand on the kingside with ...f7-f5 and develop a kingside attack.
2. Restrict or undermine White's queenside expansion with a potential ...b7-b5.

Bad bishops

A recurring theme in these positions is the fight between White's light-squared bishop and Black's dark-squared bishop. Both of these bishops are considered bad according to classical strategic theory, as they run on the same colour as their respective most-advanced pawns (on d5 for White, e5 for Black). As we will learn in this chapter, Black's dark-squared bishop is not bad at all, while White's bishop is often restricted and even useless in some positions. This is a rule to be remembered. General strategy books would not teach us this rule, but we should remember it as an essential strategic element in this particular structure.

The first game in this chapter is the relatively well-known game Grischuk – Zhang Zhong from 2001, in which White carries out a powerful queenside expansion to create a winning passed pawn. Later Zhang Zhong manages to create illustrative kingside counterplay which emphasizes Black's many attacking possibilities.

The second game is an example of White's queenside expansion, followed by a strong kingside break with g2-g4. The third game is one from my own experience: a race between Black's kingside attack and White's passed central pawns. The last two games illustrate Black's plans in the fight between the bishops. The first of these examples is a positional treatment, while the second is a sharp tactical approach, both yielding convincing victories to Black.

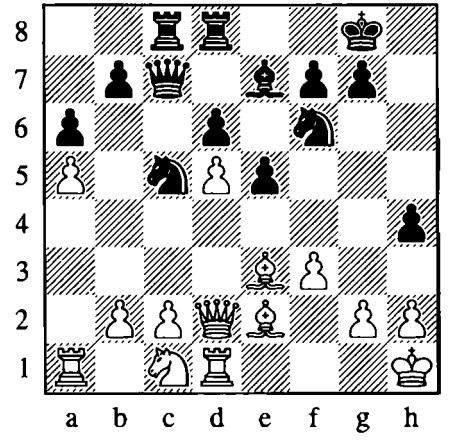
Alexander Grischuk – Zhang Zhong

Shanghai 2001

Learning objectives:

1. The phase of this game after the diagram exemplifies how White can convert his queenside expansion into a winning passed pawn.
2. Then Black launches an interesting kingside counterattack, which illustrates many of the most typical attacking resources in this position.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 h5 10.a4 ♘bd7 11.a5 ♖c8 12.♗e2 ♕c7 13.0–0 0–0 14.♔h1 ♖fd8 15.♘c1 h4 16.♖d1 ♘c5 17.♘d5 ♗xd5 18.exd5



I studied this game about ten years ago from Ftacnik's analysis in the Mega Database. I could never forget the ideas presented in it, so I think this is a great starting point for our discussion. White has reached the thematic structure at a favourable stage. The expansion with b2-b4 followed by c2-c4-c5 is just a couple of moves away, while Black's counterplay on the kingside is not particularly advanced. The game proceeded with:

18...♘h5

Black launches a healthy kingside attack to counter White's queenside play, but he is too far behind and will probably lose this race.

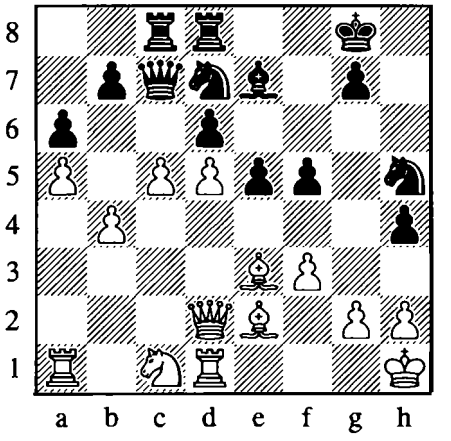
If 18...h3?! simply 19.g4! and Black does not have a way to break White's kingside, for example after 19...♘cd7 (or 19...e4 20.f4!±) 20.c4 ♖f8 21.♖g1! ♘h7 22.♖g3± the h3-pawn is lost, and White has nothing to fear on the kingside.

Black could wait for the right time to play ...h4-h3, though after 18...♘cd7 19.c4 ♖e8 20.b4 ♘f8 21.♘b3 ♕d7 22.♖ac1 h3 23.g3 e4 24.f4± White's king seems safe enough.

19.b4 ♘d7 20.c4 f5

After 20...♘f4 21.♗f1! there are no constructive continuations for Black, while 21.♗xf4?! exf4 22.♕xf4⩲ is possible, though Black's bishop gains activity, providing some compensation.

21.c5!±



21...♘df6

Of course not 21...dxc5? 22.d6.

22.c6!

Threatening ♗b6 gaining an exchange.

22...♖f8

22...bxc6 is met by 23.♗xa6! ♘xd5 24.♗c4 and White wins after either 24...♘hf6 25.♗b6 or 24...♕b8 25.b5.

23.b5!

The reader should remember this break very well, as it forces the creation of a decisive passed pawn on the a-file.

If instead 23.cxb7? ♕xb7± makes it harder to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

Or 23.♗b6 ♕b8 24.c7 ♖xc7 25.♗xc7 ♕xc7 when White is better, but the situation is far from clear.

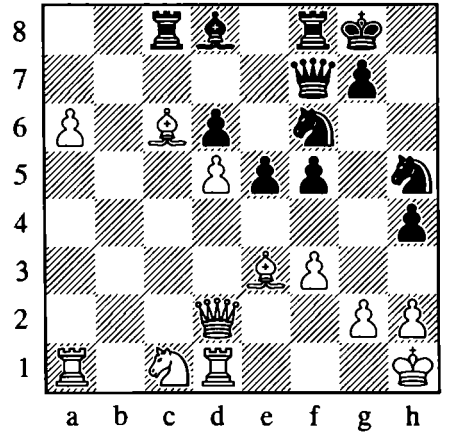
23...axb5

White is winning after 23...♗d8 24.b6 ♕f7 25.cxb7 ♕xb7 26.♕d3!.

24.♗xb5 ♗d8

Clearing a route to f7 for the queen.

25.cxb7 ♕xb7 26.♗c6 ♕f7 27.a6+–



The game is won for White, but the rest is still a very interesting exhibition of Black's tactical ideas and threats on the kingside.

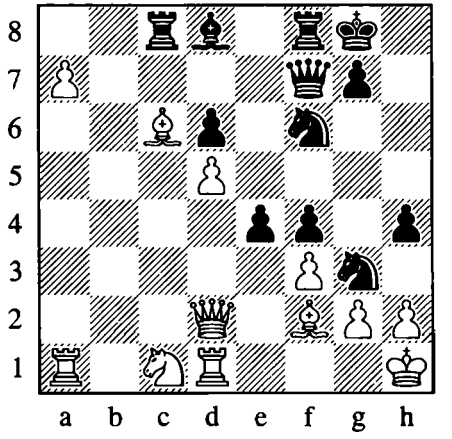
27...f4 28.♗f2 e4 29.a7!

But not 29.fxe4? ♘xe4 and suddenly White is lost, for example: 30.♕e1 ♕f5 31.♖a3 ♘hg3†! 32.♔g1 h3 33.a7 ♘xf2 34.♕xf2 ♗b6! A nice finish! 35.♕xb6 ♕c2 with forced checkmate.

29...♘g3†!?

Keeping the game complicated.

The attack is over after: 29...e3?! 30.♗xe3 fxe3 31.♕xe3+–



30.♗xg3!

The only move.

Instead the alternative 30.hxg3? hxg3 31.a8=♕ ♖xa8 32.♖xa8 ♕h5† 33.♔g1 exf3 is simply losing for White. For example, 34.gxf3 ♘e4! 35.fxe4 ♕h2† 36.♔f1 f3 37.♗xg3 ♕h1†! 38.♔f2 ♗b6†.

30...hxg3

Interesting is 30...fxg3!? since the tempting 31.a8=♕? spoils the game after 31...♖xa8 32.♖xa8 exf3 33.♖xd8 ♖xd8 34.gxf3 ♘g4! with complications.

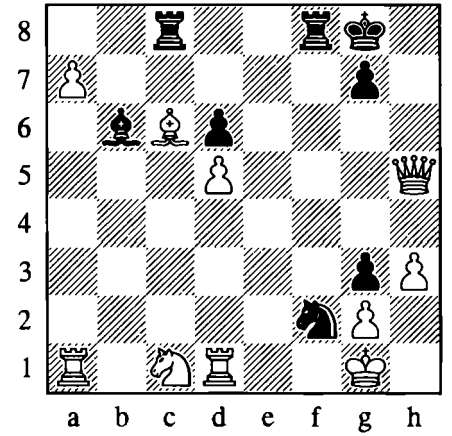
Instead 30...fxg3 should be met by 31.♕f4! winning, as the attack is over.

31.♕xf4 ♕h5 32.h3 exf3 33.♕xf3 ♘e4!?

A very funny resource!

34.♕xh5 ♘f2† 35.♔g1 ♗b6

It might seem like Black's strategy worked, but after:



36.♔f1!

It only looks scary, but in fact White is winning.

But not: 36.a8=♕?? ♘xd1† 37.♔h1 ♖f1#

36...♘xh3† 37.♔e1 ♘f4 38.♕f3
1–0

Final remarks

1. White's idea of playing c5-c6 followed by b4-b5 was essential in the creation of a strong passed pawn. Other approaches would have made White's queenside progress much slower.
2. Despite starting late, Black's counterplay proved quite dangerous. One may wonder how things would have turned out if Black had just one extra move?

Viktor Bologan – Baris Esen

Konya 2012

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White may combine his queenside expansion with kingside threats.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 h5 9.♕d2 ♘bd7 10.♘d5 ♗xd5 11.exd5

We reach the thematic structure with a standard theoretical position. There are over 150 games with this position, and both players stay within the theory for several more moves.

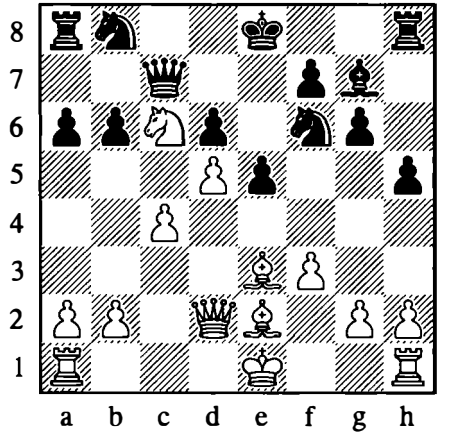
11...g6 12.♗e2 ♗g7 13.♘a5 ♕c7 14.c4 b6?!

This is a standard idea, but after studying this game I believe White's queenside plans are just stronger than Black's kingside counterplay.

I would recommend 14...e4!? 15.f4?! (preferable is 15.0–0 exf3 16.♗xf3 with approximately level chances) 15...♘g4 16.♗xg4 hxg4 17.0–0 f5 when Black had a good position in Mamedov – Korobov, Moscow 2011.

15.♘c6 ♘b8

Offering a favourable knight trade.



16.♘b4

This knight will be essential in White's queenside plans, hence it should stay on the board.

But not 16.♘xb8?! ♖xb8 17.0–0 0–0 18.♖ac1 (or 18.b4 e4!=) 18...a5 (a key move, preventing b2-b4) 19.b3 ♘d7 when Black had a comfortable position in Hajnal – Papp, Hungary 2008.

16...♘bd7 17.0–0 0–0 18.♖ac1 ♘c5

If 18...♘h7, trying to accelerate kingside play, then: 19.♘c6 f5 (19...♘b8? no longer works, on account of 20.♘xb8 ♖axb8 21.b4! ♖fe8 22.c5± as White is breaking on the queenside far too quickly) 20.b4 ♖ae8 21.♗d1!?± This is similar to the game; White's chances are much better, as he has strong plans on both flanks.

Alternatively, trying to open lines with 18...e4 can be met by 19.f4! since there is no time for 19...♘g4?! 20.♗xg4 hxg4 because of 21.f5! with advantage.

19.♘c2 a5

Preventing b2-b4.

19...e4 is met by 20.f4! keeping the e4-square unavailable to Black's knights, and threatening f4-f5 (20.♘d4!? is also worth considering) 20...♘g4 21.♗d4 ♗xd4† 22.♘xd4 ♕e7 (but not 22...f5? 23.b4 ♘d7 24.♘e6 and wins) 23.♗xg4 hxg4 24.f5!± with a strong attack.

If 19...♖ae8 20.b4 ♘cd7 21.♘a1!? (planning ♘b3 and c4-c5) 21...a5!? (if Black tries 21...h4 22.♘b3 ♘h5 then 23.c5!± and the queenside collapses) 22.bxa5 bxa5 23.♘c2± followed by ♘a3-b5.

20.♘a3±

Surprisingly, this advanced position has occurred in no fewer than five games (White scored 80%). This is an indication of how typical, and how strong, this knight manoeuvre is.

20...♘h7?!

More accurate was 20...h4!? 21.♘b5 ♕e7 22.♗d1 ♘h5 23.b3 f5 24.a3 h3! allowing Black to continue fighting, though White's position was still preferable in Goloshchapov – Anisimov, Russia 2006.

21.♘b5 ♕e7 22.b3 f5

22...e4 does not work well after 23.♗f4! ♗e5 24.♗xe5 ♕xe5 25.f4! ♕e7 26.f5± creating a kingside attack and isolating the e4-pawn.

23.♗d1!

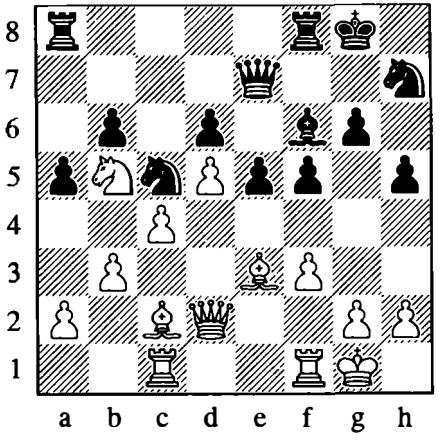
The right plan.

23...♗f6

The try 23...e4?! is met by 24.♗c2 exf3 25.gxf3! when only White benefits from the opening of new lines, for example 25...♖fe8 26.♖ce1 ♕d7 27.♔h1 followed by ♖g1 with a near decisive advantage.

Whereas the attempt 23...f4, hoping to play 24...e4, is met by 24.♗xc5! bxc5 25.♗c2± preventing ...e5-e4 and obtaining a big advantage due to the control of the light squares and Black's bad bishop.

24.♗c2±



The reader should pay close attention to how powerful White's light-squared bishop is in this position. This bishop not only neutralizes Black's plans on the kingside, but also creates the potential threat g2-g4 blowing up the f5-g6-h5 pawn barrier.

24...♖ad8 25.♖ce1 ♘g5 26.a3 ♘f7?

The decisive mistake.

A better defence was 26...♖a8 but after 27.♘xd6!? (another option is 27.♔h1 preparing the strong g2-g4 break) 27...♘xf3† (or 27...♕xd6 28.♗xg5+–) 28.gxf3 ♕xd6 29.♔h1± Black is under serious pressure down the g-file.

27.b4 axb4

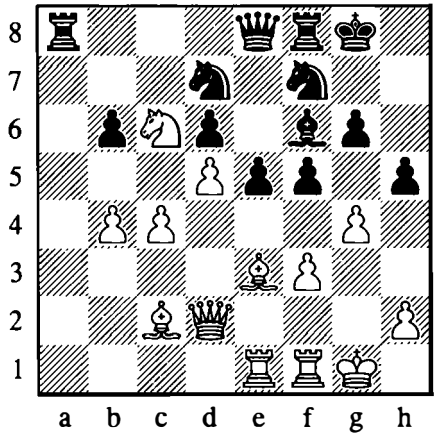
Or 27...♘d7 28.♘a7 ♖a8 29.♘c6 ♕e8 30.g4!+– which is similar to the game.

28.axb4 ♘d7 29.♘a7 ♖a8

29...♕e8 30.♘c6 ♖a8 transposes to the game.

30.♘c6 ♕e8 31.g4!+–

Successfully breaking through Black's kingside pawn structure.



31...♖a2

If 31...hxg4 32.fxg4 f4 33.♗xf4! winning a pawn because of the pin down the e-file.

32.gxf5 g5

Black attempts to build a fortress, but the game is lost beyond repair. The rest is simple and somewhat irrelevant, hence I leave it without much comment.

33.♕d1 ♔h7 34.♗b1 ♖a8 35.♔h1 ♖g8 36.♖g1 ♖g7 37.♖g2 ♕c8 38.h4!

Opening up the position!

38...gxh4 39.♖g6

Better was 39.♖xg7†! ♔xg7 40.♖g1† ♔f8 41.♕d2 winning on the spot due to the threat of ♗h6.

39...♕a6 40.♖eg1 ♔h8 41.f4 ♖h7 42.♕e2 h3 43.fxe5 dxe5 44.♗c1 ♖e8 45.♗b2 ♕c8 46.♕e3 ♕c7 47.♗e4 ♕d6 48.♗c1 ♕f8 49.♕xh3

Black's position falls apart little by little.

49...♘d6 50.♗d3 ♖a8 51.♗b2 ♘f7 52.♕g3 ♖e8 53.♖e1 ♗g7 54.♖e6 ♗f6 55.♖g1 ♖g7 56.♕h2 ♘g5 57.♗e2 ♖h7 58.♖xg5! ♗xg5 59.♘xe5

The fortress is finally destroyed.

59...♖xe6 60.♘xd7† ♔g8 61.♘xf8
1–0

Final remarks

1. Special attention should be played to the notes to Black's moves 16 and 18. The essential element in trading those knights is whether Black will be able to play ...a6-a5 preventing b2-b4. If that is the case, then Black will generally do well since the queenside play loses most of its strength.
2. The bishop transfer ♗d1-c2 followed by the kingside break g2-g4 is extremely powerful.
3. After analyzing this position one might be left with the impression that Black's kingside play is not really going anywhere if White knows his way around. In the game this was true, but Black could certainly have improved his chances with the safer 14...e4 as suggested above.

Mauricio Flores Rios – Neuris Delgado

American Continental Championship 2009

Learning objective: This game is an interesting example of Black's kingside attack against White's passed central pawns.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7 8.♗e3 0–0 9.♕d2 ♗e6 10.♘d5 ♗xd5 11.exd5 ♘b8

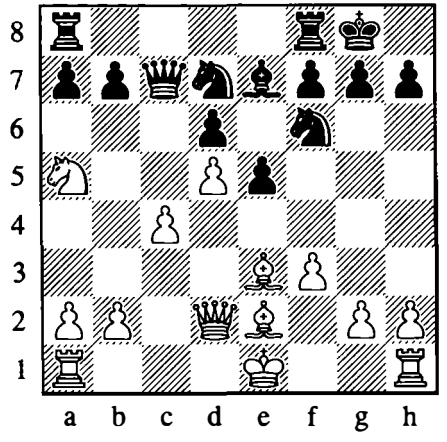
We have reached the thematic position. White will try to expand on the queenside with the usual c2-c4-c5.

12.♗e2 ♘bd7 13.♘a5

Opening the way for b2-b4.

13...♕c7 14.c4!?

Similar is: 14.0–0 ♗d8! 15.b4 (of course, returning with the knight would be inconsistent: 15.♘b3?! ♘b6! 16.♗xb6 ♕xb6† 17.♔h1 a5∓) 15...♕b8! Threatening ...♗xa5 destroying White's queenside structure. 16.♘b3 ♗b6!= Trading dark-squared bishops ensures a good position for Black, as in the game Cubas – Delgado Ramirez, Asuncion 2010.



14...♘h5!?

This ambitious move is typical, opening the way for ...f7-f5. The resulting position is objectively preferable for White, but rather complicated in a practical game.

Simpler and somewhat preferable was 14...♗d8!? 15.b4 ♕c8 16.♘b3 ♗b6 trading dark-squared bishops with level chances in Kernazhitsky – Chernyshov, Zalakaros 2005, since after 17.c5 dxc5 18.♖c1 then simply 18...c4!∓.

15.b4!

A precise move order. Weaker is 15.0–0 ♘f4 16.b4 (but not 16.♗d1?! because of 16...♗d8! 17.b4 ♕c8 18.♘b3 ♕xc4) 16...♘xe2† 17.♕xe2 f5 with level chances.

15...f5

White is ready to meet 15...♘f4 with 16.♗d1!. It is a good idea to keep this bishop on the board, for example after 16...f5 17.♖c1 ♖f7 18.0–0± Black is in trouble, due to the threat of ♗b3 followed by c4-c5.

16.0–0 ♖f6?!

This plan is interesting, but somewhat too slow.

An alternative was 16...♖ae8 17.♖ac1 b6 18.♘c6 ♗h4 with a complicated position.

17.♖fd1 ♖g6 18.♖ac1

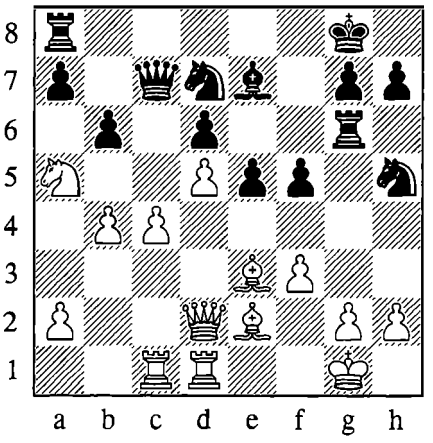
Preparing a c4-c5 break.

18...b6

During the game I thought at first that this was an excellent decision, as I had to decide between passively going back to b3, or placing my knight on c6. I was unsure if the knight on c6 would be useful at all, but fortunately for me, I found a tactical resource to refute Black's plan.

An alternative was 18...♘f4 19.♗xf4 exf4 20.♔h1± when Black is likely to lose a pawn on the kingside, but there is some counterplay associated with the control of the dark squares.

If Black simply waits with 18...♖f8?! then 19.c5! opens the queenside favourably.



19.♘c6!

The key to this move becomes clear in the next two moves.

Incorrect is:

19.♘b3?

Since c4-c5 is no longer strong, and Black may develop a strong kingside initiative, such as:

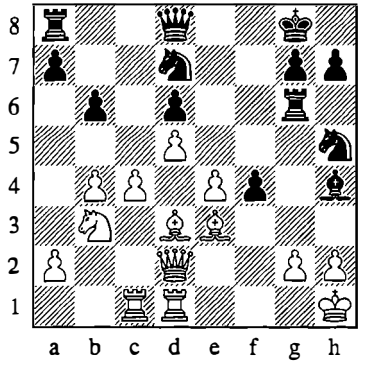
19...♕d8

Another option is: 19...♖f8!?

20.♔h1

Or 20.♗d3 e4! 21.fxe4 f4 22.♗d4 f3 with attacking chances for Black.

20...♗h4 21.♗d3 e4 22.fxe4 f4:



There is nothing better than giving up the exchange with:

23.♗xf4

Bad is 23.♗d4? f3! with a winning attack, since 24.gxf3?! loses to 24...♘g3†!! 25.hxg3 ♗xg3 followed by ...♕h4 deciding the game.

23...♘xf4 24.♕xf4 ♗g5 25.♕f2 ♗xc1 26.♖xc1 ♘e5∓

19...♗h4 20.♗d3 ♖f8

The alternative was 20...f4 21.♗f2 ♗xf2† 22.♕xf2± followed by a2-a4-a5 with very good prospects.

21.♕c2!

Unexpectedly winning a pawn, since f5 cannot be protected.

21...e4!

A good decision: Black has to give up a pawn, but does it in the form of a typical sacrifice obtaining some compensation.

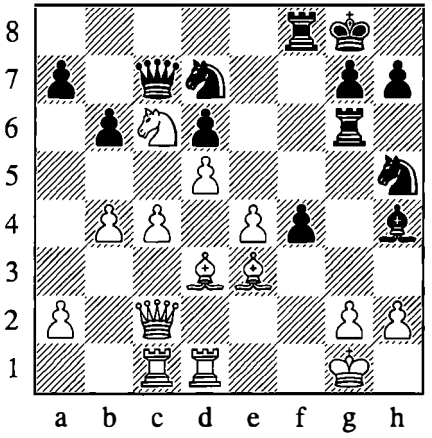
But not 21...♖gf6? 22.♘e7†. This is the point of White's 19th move, which was probably missed by Black: 22...♔h8 23.♘xf5 Winning even more material.

22.fxe4?

Certainly not the right way to make use of the advantage, as it allows Black good compensation.

22.♗e2! was accurate, forcing material gain under better circumstances: 22...f4 (if 22...exf3? 23.♗xf3 ♗g5 24.♗xg5 ♖xg5 25.h4!+–) 23.♕xe4! I missed this move, when White should be winning, though Black retains some practical chances.

22...f4



The reader should be familiar with this type of pawn sacrifice; Black gives up a pawn, but gains space on the kingside, as well as the e5-square for a knight. Chances are balanced again.

23.♗f2

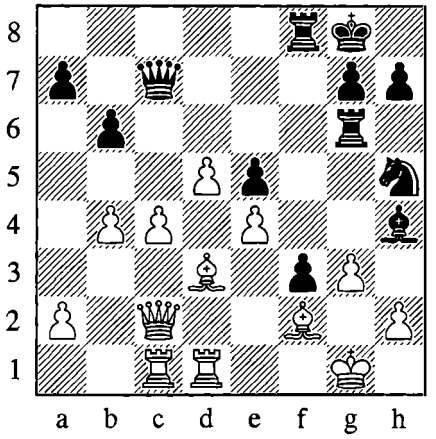
Or 23.♗d4 f3 with a dangerous attack.

23...f3 24.g3 ♘e5!

A precise move order.

Weaker is: 24...♘xg3?! 25.♗xg3! (but not 25.hxg3?! ♘e5 26.♘xe5 dxe5 27.♔f1 ♗xg3 28.♗xg3 ♖xg3 with reasonable compensation for the piece) 25...♘e5 (but not 25...♗xg3? 26.♘e7†+–) 26.♘xe5 dxe5 27.♔f2 White should be winning with precise play, though Black still has some practical chances with 27...♕d8!?. For example 28.c5? (better is 28.♖g1±) 28...♗xg3† 29.hxg3 ♖xg3! 30.♔xg3 ♕g5†= forcing a perpetual check, since 31.♔h2? (31.♔f2=) loses to 31...♖f4 with forced mate.

25.♘xe5 dxe5



The reader should examine this critical position carefully. Black has employed a pawn sacrifice which is typical of this structure, and now White's position seems to be on the verge of losing, on account of potential piece sacrifices on g3, followed by a mating attack. When I reached this position however, I was somewhat optimistic, since I had calculated:

26.♔f1!

Which is apparently the only move, and the beginning of an interesting idea. I decided to bring the king to a safer place, even at the cost of material, to be able subsequently to push the c- and d-pawns decisively.

Instead, attempting to consolidate the kingside with 26.♗f1? fails to 26...♕d8 27.c5 ♘xg3! with a decisive attack: 28.hxg3 ♗xg3 29.♗xg3 ♖xg3† 30.♔f2 (or 30.♔h1 f2 with forced checkmate) 30...♕h4 White cannot escape. For example: 31.♔e3 f2†! 32.♔e2 ♕g4† 33.♔d2 ♕f4† 34.♔e2 ♕e3#

Similar is 26.c5? ♗xg3! 27.hxg3 ♘xg3 28.♗xg3 ♖xg3† 29.♔f1 ♕d8! followed by ...♕g5 winning.

26...♗g5

Preparing the ...♕d7-h3 invasion.

Of course not 26...♕d7? 27.gxh4.

The piece sacrifice 26...♘xg3†!? is still possible: 27.hxg3 and now 27...♗xg3 (or 27...♖xg3!? with unclear position) leads to a draw after the forced line: 28.♗xg3 ♖xg3 29.♕h2! ♖g2 30.♕h3 ♕d8! 31.♖c2 ♕g5 32.♖xg2 fxg2† 33.♔g1 ♕f4 34.♔xg2 ♖f6 Black's attack could be dangerous, therefore White should choose: 35.♕c8†! ♔f7 36.♕d7† ♔f8 (but not 36...♔g6? 37.♖g1!+–) 37.♖f1 ♖g6† 38.♔h1 ♖h6† 39.♔g2 ♖g6† A very nice perpetual check.

27.♔e1!

A prophylactic move, freeing the f1-square in order to reply to 27...♕d7 with 28.♗f1 preventing the deadly invasion on h3.

Instead, the natural 27.♖b1? allows 27...♕c8! when the entry on h3 is decisive, for example: 28.♔e1 ♕h3 29.♗g1 f2†! Opening the f-file decisively. 30.♗xf2 ♖gf6 31.♗g1 ♖f1†! 32.♗xf1 ♕xf1#

27...♕d7!?

Or 27...♗xc1 28.♖xc1 is similar to the game.

28.♗f1

Necessary and effective, keeping Black's offensive under control.

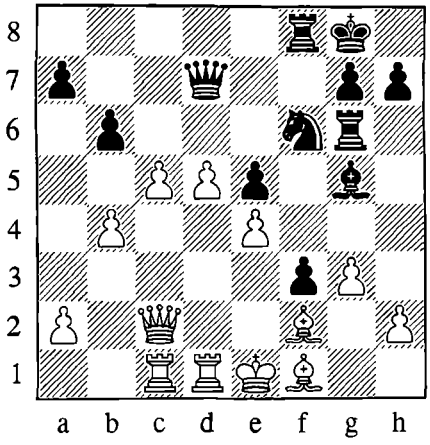
28...♘f6

If 28...♗xc1 29.♖xc1 ♘f6 30.c5 transposes to the note to the next move.

29.c5!

Black's initiative has been neutralized, and now the pawns start marching.

Again 29.♖b1?, keeping the exchange, gives Black some initiative after: 29...♘g4!?



29...♘g4

Creating the threats ♘xh2, ...♘e3 or ...♗e3.

If 29...♗xc1 30.♖xc1 White has more than enough compensation for the exchange: 30...♘g4 (or 30...♖g4 31.♗d3) 31.c6 ♕d6 32.♕b3!± Black's threats have come to a stop, while the passed pawns are very strong.

30.d6

One more step toward promotion; the threat is c5-c6-c7 nearly winning. In addition, this move creates the possible check ♕b3, protecting the e3-square against ...♗e3 or ...♘e3.

30...bxc5

Necessary was 30...♘xf2! 31.♔xf2 ♖h6 32.h4 ♕g4 with a very unclear position.

The capture 30...♘xh2? is way too slow: 31.c6 ♕c8 32.c7 followed by d6-d7 winning.

And of course not: 30...♗e3? 31.♗xe3 ♘xe3 32.♕b3† ♔h8 33.♕xe3+–

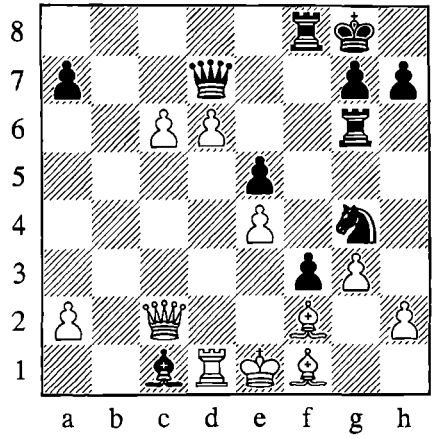
31.bxc5 ♗xc1?

The decisive mistake.

Again, necessary was 31...♘xf2! 32.♔xf2 ♖h6 with an unclear position.

32.c6!+–

A very important intermediate move, after which White is just winning.



32...♕c8

Or: 32...♕d8 33.c7 ♕d7 34.♖xc1+–

If 32...♗e3 33.cxd7 ♗xf2† 34.♕xf2 ♘xf2 35.♗c4†! ♔h8 36.♔xf2 the endgame is winning with the transfer ♗f7-e8.

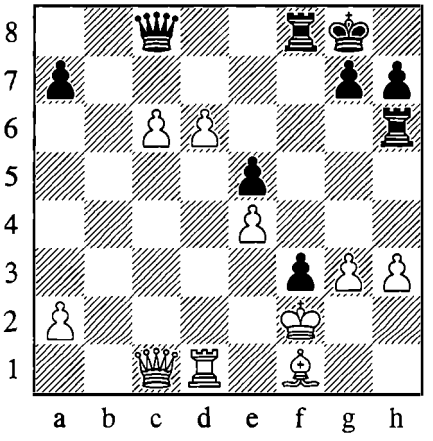
33.♕xc1

White is an exchange down, but the two pawns on the 6th rank decide the game.

33...♘xf2

Again there is no time for 33...♘xh2 because of: 34.c7! ♕d7 35.♗a6+–

34.♔xf2 ♖h6 35.h3!



Black's threats are completely neutralized, and the rest of the game is just a tactical exhibition.

35...♕b8!?

An interesting resource during time trouble, searching for counterplay with 36...♕b6.

35...♖xh3? fails to: 36.d7 ♖h2† 37.♔g1 ♕c7 38.♔xh2+–

36.♕c4† ♔h8 37.♕b5

Blocking the queen's invasion.

37...♕c8 38.♕c5

An X-ray attack against the rook on f8.

38...♖g8 39.d7!

This rather paradoxical pawn advance decides the game nicely. Typically, one should push pawns onto squares of the opposite colour to one's bishop, but here we can make an exception for tactical reasons.

39.c7!?+– would be more conceptual.

39...♕c7 40.d8=♕

This is the motive behind the previous move; Black is now unable to prevent the promotion of the c6-pawn.

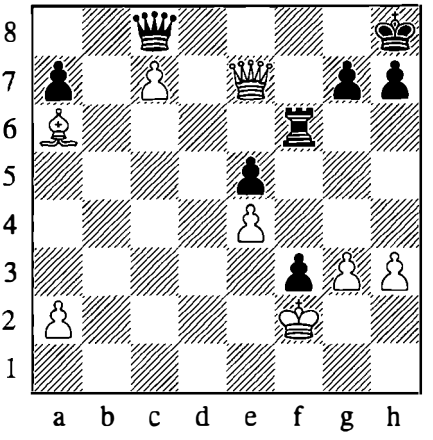
40...♖xd8 41.♖xd8† ♕xd8 42.c7 ♕c8 43.♕e7!

Threatening ♕d8 with checkmate.

43...♖f6

If 43...♖e6 White has the nice variation 44.♕d8† ♖e8 45.♕xe8†! ♕xe8 46.♗a6 followed by promotion and winning with an extra piece.

44.♗a6!



A neat final blow. Black resigned since his pieces are overloaded in the defence of the 8th rank: 44...♕g8 45.c8=♕ or 44...♖xa6 45.♕d8† or 44...♕xa6 45.♕d8†.

1–0

Final remarks

1. A critical factor during the opening phase was whether Black would be able to exchange pieces, reducing White's queenside potential. The comments to moves 14 and 15 deserve special attention.
2. Despite some tactical inaccuracies, Black's kingside potential proved dangerous throughout the game.
3. The reader should remember the typical pawn sacrifice ...e5-e4 followed by ...f5-f4.
4. The most exciting moment in this game is probably when White plays ♔f1-e1 giving up the exchange in order to secure his king and continue advancing his central passed pawns.

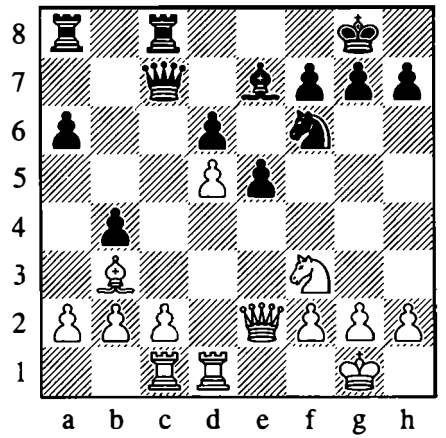
Judit Polgar – Leinier Dominguez Perez

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates the difference in quality and potential between White's bad light-squared bishop, and Black's 'bad' dark-squared bishop.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘f3 ♗e7 8.♗c4 0–0 9.0–0 ♕c7 10.♗b3 ♗e6 11.♕e2 ♖c8 12.♖fd1 b5 13.♗g5 ♘bd7 14.♖ac1 b4 15.♘d5 ♗xd5 16.♗xf6 ♘xf6 17.exd5?

A very questionable positional decision. Better was 17.♗xd5 ♘xd5 18.♖xd5 ♕c4!? 19.♕xc4 ♖xc4 20.♘d2 ♖c6 when Black has only a microscopic advantage after 21.c4!.



The reader should study this position carefully, as it is essential for the understanding of the chapter. As we have studied in the previous games, White's plan is to accomplish an expansion on the queenside with the usual b2-b4, c2-c4-c5; we know this is not going to happen in this game. Still, it is possible for White to open the queenside with c2-c3, but is this really going to help? The answer is no. There is a bigger factor *hiding in the positional background* and the reader should learn this once and forever. White's biggest problem is the qualitative difference between the bishops. Although both bishops are momentarily blocked, only Black's bishop has active prospects, either on the diagonal a1-h8, or the diagonal g1-a7. Meanwhile, White's bishop will be a spectator throughout the entire game. It is not uncommon for players of the white pieces (even at the top level) to go into this kind of position without seriously accounting for this problem, and this game is a wonderful illustration of how to convert Black's positional advantage into a full point.

17...♕d7!∓

Covering the a4-square, and so preventing White from improving her bishop with ♗a4-c6.

18.♗c4 ♕a7

The manoeuvre ...♕d7-a7 has prevented White's bishop from moving to c6. Note that this bishop will not move again (or do anything) for the rest of the game.

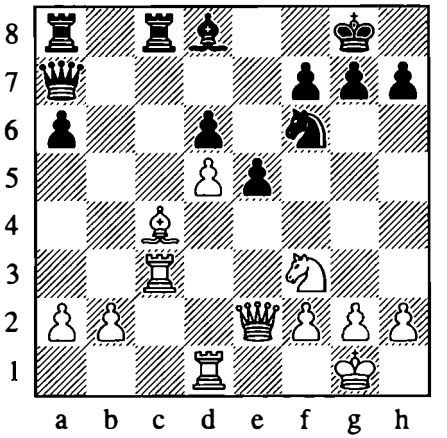
Another option was 18...♖c5!? since 19.♗xa6? ♘xd5∓ gives Black a big advantage due to his central control.

19.c3

If White insists with 19.♗b3, intending to follow with ♗a4-c6, then 19...♖c5 pressures the d5-pawn, preventing the manoeuvre, or 19...♕d7!? 20.♗c4 ♖c5 as explained above.

19...bxc3 20.♖xc3 ♗d8

Transferring the bishop to b6 where it will exert strong pressure on f2.



21.♘g5?!

Polgar does not like passive defence, and prefers to embark on a questionable attack.

More natural was 21.♖dc1 but Black can slowly improve his position: 21...♖ab8 22.♖3c2 a5 23.b3 a4∓

Another option is 21.♘d2 ♖ab8 22.b3 (but not 22.♗xa6? ♖xc3 23.bxc3 ♘xd5∓) 22...a5 23.♖dc1 ♗b6 24.♖f3 threatening ♖xf6 with counterplay, but after 24...♕e7 White cannot solve her problems. For example: 25.♘e4 ♘xe4 26.♕xe4 g6∓ followed by ...f7-f5, and note that the optimistic 27.g4? intending to prevent ...f7-f5 is refuted by 27...f5! since 28.gxf5? loses the rook to 28...♕g5†.

21...a5 22.♖f3?!

The position is not well-suited for kingside operations, and Black easily neutralizes any possible threats. Nevertheless, it is difficult to suggest a better approach.

Trading knights with 22.♘e4 ♘xe4 23.♕xe4 is similar to the game: 23...♖ab8 24.b3 (or 24.♖c2 a4∓) 24...a4∓

A worthy alternative was 22.a4!? preventing Black from playing ...a5-a4, though after 22...♗b6 23.♖f3 ♕e7 24.b3 g6∓ Black progresses slowly with ...♗c5, ...♖ab8 and later a kingside expansion with ...f7-f5 and ...e5-e4.

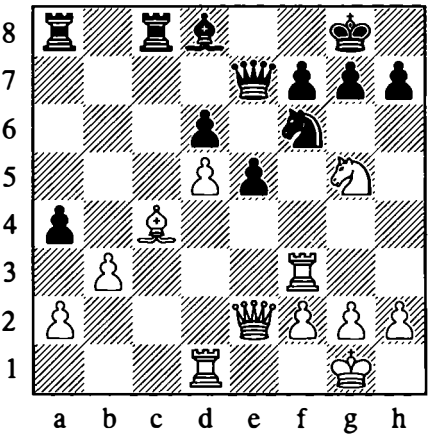
22...♕e7 23.b3?!

This move makes it easier for Black to carry out a desirable break.

A better option was 23.♘e4, though after 23...♘xe4 24.♕xe4 ♖ab8 25.♕e2 g6∓ Black enjoys a pleasing positional edge due to his much better bishop and his chances to expand with ...f7-f5.

23...a4!∓

Logical and very strong, as it opens the a-file for Black's rook, and forces the creation of a weak b3-pawn.



24.♖h3

If 24.bxa4 ♖xa4 25.♗b5 ♖b4 26.♗c6 (or 26.♖b3 ♖xb3 27.axb3 e4!?∓) 26...h6 27.♘h3 ♖cb8 winning because of the invasion down the b-file and the poor coordination of White's forces. Note how the light-squared bishop is still doing nothing.

If 24.♗a6?! ♖c7 25.bxa4 h6! 26.♘h3 (26.♘e4?? ♘xe4 27.♕xe4 ♖xa6–+) 26...♘xd5! regaining the pawn with dividends.

24...g6 25.♕c2 axb3 26.axb3 ♗b6

Even stronger was the concrete 26...e4! 27.♕e2 ♕e5 28.♖g3 ♖a1! threatening ...♖xe1 followed by ...♖a8-a1 29.♖xa1 ♕xa1† 30.♕f1 ♕e5 (threatening ...♘h5) 31.♕e2 ♖a8 when White's position is hopeless.

27.♖f1 ♘g4

A logical move, but not the strongest.

Even better was 27...e4! threatening ...e4-e3 with a winning position, for example: 28.♔h1 ♘g4! 29.♘xe4 ♖xc4!! 30.♕xc4 ♕xe4 31.♕xe4 ♘xf2†–+ The reader should not be fooled into thinking this is "just tactics" and Black has been very lucky. All these tactical resources are the result of Black's strategic superiority, particularly White's inability to fight for the dark squares.

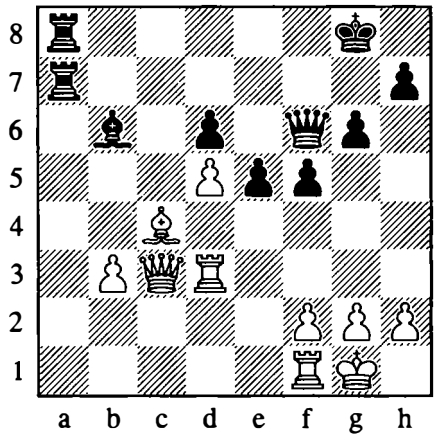
28.♘e4

But not 28.♘xh7? due to 28...♘xf2!–+ demolishing White's defence, e.g. 29.♖xf2?! ♖a1†.

28...f5 29.♖g3 ♘f6

Even stronger was 29...♖f8! keeping the knights on the board: 30.♘c3 e4 31.♘d1 (31.♘xe4 is met by 31...♕e5! [threatening ...♖a1] 32.♘c3 ♘xf2!–+) 31...♖a1 White is losing, for example: 32.♖c3 ♕a7 33.h3 ♘xf2! 34.♘xf2 ♖a2 35.♕c1 ♗xf2†–+

30.♘xf6† ♕xf6 31.♖d3 ♖c7 32.♕c3 ♖ca7



This is a good moment to stop and reflect upon the last few moves. Black has achieved the typical expansion ...f7-f5, placed a bishop on the strong f2-a7 diagonal, and opened the a-file, which he is now ready to invade. Meanwhile, White has accomplished absolutely nothing. I am certainly not trying to say that Judit Polgar has been completely outplayed; in fact both players have made some inaccuracies. My point is that the position after move 17 gives Black excellent prospects and very clear plans, while White does not have constructive ideas, and even the very best players would struggle to find something productive to do.

33.♖d2 ♗d4 34.♕d3 ♖a1 35.g3 ♖xf1† 36.♔xf1 ♗c5

Preparing ...e5-e4 gaining more space.

37.♔g2 e4 38.♕e2 ♖e8 39.f3

This ugly move is necessary, because of Black's threat of ...f5-f4-f3.

Waiting with 39.♖a2 loses to 39...f4! 40.gxf4 (40.f3 ♕d4 or 40.♔h1 f3 41.♕e1 e3 are both hopeless) 40...♕xf4 when White is defenceless. For example: 41.♔h1 ♖e5 42.♕f1 ♖h5 43.♕g2 ♖g5 44.♕h3 (or 44.♕f1 ♕f3† 45.♕g2 ♕xg2#) 44...♗xf2 45.♖a8† ♔g7–+

39...exf3† 40.♕xf3 ♖e3

Black's position is practically winning, as only a computer would be precise enough to defend this position in the long run. Even the smallest mistake would cost White the game.

41.♕f1

Instead, the natural 41.♕f4? loses to 41...♖e1! (threatening ...♗e3) 42.♖a2 ♖g1†! 43.♔h3 g5 with forced checkmate.

41...♕e5

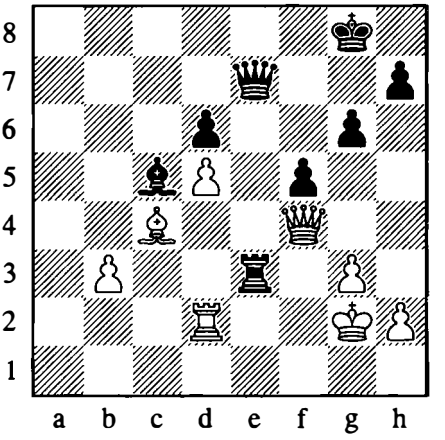
Threatening ...♕e4.

More precise was 41...♕e7! 42.♕f4 ♖e1 and now the natural 43.♖a2? loses to 43...♗e3! 44.♕f3 ♖g1† 45.♔h3 ♕g5 exactly as in the game, while after 43.♕f3 ♖g1† 44.♔h3 ♕f6!? White's position is nearly lost too; the threat is ...g6-g5-g4.

42.♕f4

The only defence.

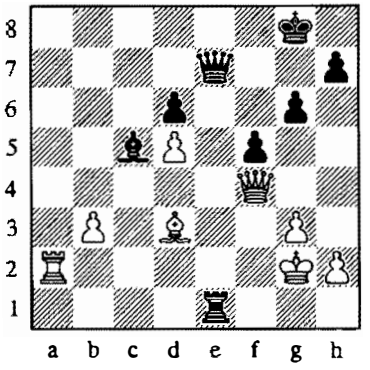
42...♕e7



43.♖a2 ♖e1 44.b4?

A blunder in an extremely difficult position.

A better defence was 44.♗d3 but after:



44...♔g7! White is running out of moves. For example, the natural sequence 45.♖c2?! ♕f7! 46.♗c4? loses to 46...♖g1† 47.♔h3 h6! followed by ...g6-g5-g4 checkmating soon.

Or: 44.♗f1 ♖e4 45.♕f3 ♖e3 46.♕f4 ♖xb3∓

44...♗e3–+ 45.♕f3

Also hopeless is: 45.♕h4 g5 46.♕h5 ♕e4† 47.♔h3 (47.♕f3 ♖g1†) 47...g4† 48.♔h4 ♕e7† 49.♕g5† ♕xg5#

45...♖g1† 46.♔h3 ♕g5

White resigned due to the threatened ...♕h6†.

0–1

Final remarks

1. White's light-squared bishop was memorably useless in this game. The reader should never forget the tremendous imbalance between the bishops.
2. White's biggest mistake was 17.exd5. Since Polgar was close to equality after 17.♗xd5 I would dare to assume she did not expect her position to be so bad after this structure transformation. Players of all levels fall into this strategic mistake very often, and it is something to be remembered.
3. The expansion with ...g7-g6, ...f7-f5, ...e5-e4 is standard and a strong plan if carried out with the appropriate preparation.

Jonny Hector – Richard Rapport

Malmo 2013

Learning objective: This game is a tactical illustration of how Black's dark-squared bishop is much more powerful than White's light-squared bishop.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗e3 a6 8.♕e2 ♕c7 9.0–0–0 ♗d7 10.♗b3 b5 11.♘xc6?!

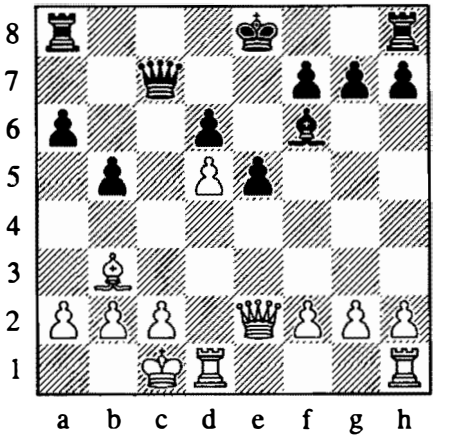
This may not be exactly a mistake, but it is heading in the wrong direction.

Another option was 11.f3!?.

11...♗xc6 12.♗d4 ♗e7 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘d5 ♗xd5

Of course not: 14...exd5? 15.exd5†±

15.exd5 e5



It seems as if White has been heading toward this position since 11.♘xc6, and here we are. Was this a good decision? Based on what we have learned in the previous games, the answer is "Definitely not!" White's standard plan in this position is to expand his majority on the queenside, but this is unthinkable after queenside castling. Moreover, the bishop on b3 is restricted by its own pawns, basically doing nothing, while Black's bishop on f6 has a strong potential to

press against White's king, say after the typical pawn sacrifice ...e5-e4! Objectively speaking, this position is slightly better for Black, but in practice Black already has a big advantage since White has no real targets to attack.

16.♖d3

Attempting to neutralize Black's attack through active play on the queenside.

In the event of 16.♔b1 0–0 17.c3 ♖fb8 18.♗c2 a5∓ Black may comfortably push on the queenside, and sacrifice with ...e5-e4 opening the long diagonal whenever convenient.

16...♕d7 17.♖c3 a5 18.a3 0–0

Black could have damaged White's queenside immediately with: 18...b4! 19.♗c4 (threatening ♗b5; the alternative 19.♖c6 does not help after: 19...bxa3 20.bxa3 0–0∓) 19...0–0 (19...bxc3?? 20.♗b5+–) 20.♖b3 ♖fb8∓ With a powerful attack.

19.♖c6 a4

Another option was 19...♖fb8 (preparing ...a5-a4 followed by ...b5-b4) 20.♗a2 (of course not 20.c3?! b4!) 20...e4!?∓ with good active play for Black.

20.♗a2 b4!?

An interesting practical chance in the spirit of the position, but 20...♖ac8!? also deserves attention.

21.axb4 a3 22.b3

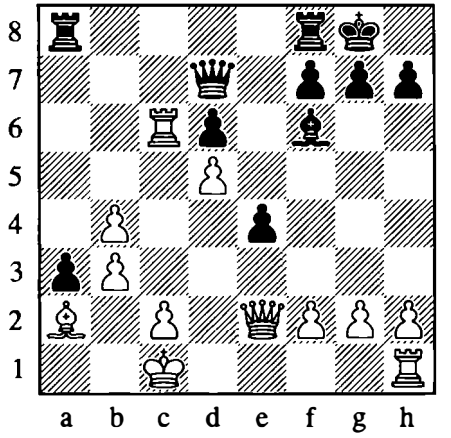
Accepting an inferior position; White will ineffectively attempt to keep Black's initiative under control.

A better defence was 22.c3 though after 22...e4!? White's position is very difficult to play despite being only slightly better for Black. As an example, consider 23.♕xe4?! – just one imprecision, and everything falls apart: 23...♕a7! 24.♔b1 axb2 25.♕c4 ♕xf2–+

Better is: 23.b5 axb2† 24.♔xb2 ♖fb8∓

22...e4!∓

Opening the long diagonal for the bishop on f6. This is a dream position for Black, as the bishop on a2 is out of the game, while the a3-pawn is a strong attacking resource. Once again in this fight of opposite-coloured bishops, Black's bishop proves far superior regardless of White having more pawns.



23.♖e1

Capturing the pawn with 23.♕xe4? only opens lines for Black's decisive attack: 23...♖fe8 24.♕f3 (or 24.♕d3 ♕g4! 25.g3 ♖e2–+) 24...♖e5 25.♖d1 ♖ae8 White is defenceless against the plan ...♖e2, ...♕e7-e5-b2, which is very similar to the game.

23...g6

A somewhat strange move, probably protecting the 8th rank!? Black's position is so good that he can afford some creativity.

More direct was 23...♕f5 24.♕xe4 ♕xf2 25.♕e2 ♕f4† 26.♔b1 ♕xb4 with a near-decisive advantage.

24.f4?

A poor decision in a very difficult situation.

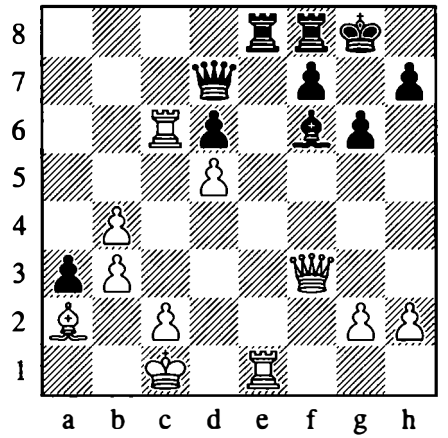
Better was 24.b5, reinforcing the rook on c6 to keep the c-file blocked, but after 24...♕f5 (threatening ...♕e5-b2) 25.c3 ♗g5† 26.♔d1 (26.♔b1? e3† 27.♔a1 exf2 28.♖f1 ♖ae8–+)

26...♕xd5† 27.♔c2 ♖ab8∓ White's position continues to be fragile.

If 24.♖c4 ♖ac8!? 25.♖xe4 ♗c3 26.♖d1 ♖fe8∓ White's pieces remain trapped in a cage.

Of course not 24.♕xe4?? ♖fe8.

24...exf3 25.♕xf3 ♖ae8!–+



White is basically a piece down and cannot parry Black's multiple mating threats. The rest of the game is easy, but fun to watch.

26.♖d1

Exchanging rooks doesn't help: 26.♖xe8 ♕xe8! 27.♔d2 (27.♕xf6?? ♕e1#) 27...♕e5 With multiple winning threats, such ...♕b2xa2 or ...♖e8 with a mating attack.

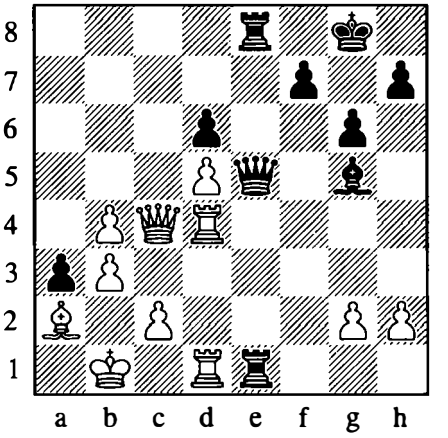
26...♗g5† 27.♔b1 ♖e3 28.♕f1 ♕e7

Threatening ...♕e5-b2#.

29.♖c4 ♖e8 30.♖cd4 ♕e5 31.♕c4

If White just waits with 31.h3 then 31...♖e1! 32.♖xe1 ♕xe1† 33.♖d1 ♕c3 is checkmating.

31...♖e1



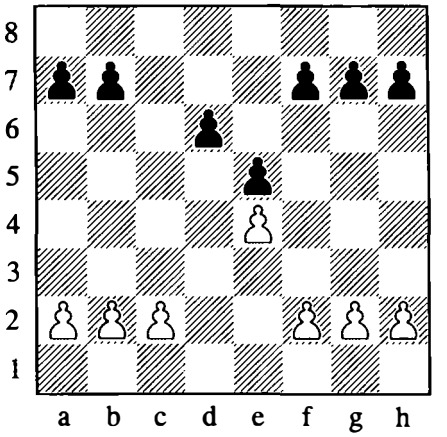
Checkmate is unstoppable: 32.♕d3 ♖xd1† 33.♕xd1 ♕xd4! 34.♕xd4 ♖e1† 35.♕d1 ♖xd1# **0–1**

Final remarks

1. In both this game and the previous one, Black's bishop played an essential role in attacking White's king. This time, Black used the strong diagonal a1-h8.
2. This battle was even more imbalanced than in the previous game, as White's king on the queenside basically prevents any attempt to expand the queenside majority.

Chapter 9

Najdorf Type II



Just as in the previous chapter, I shall emphasize that this structure is not only typical of the Najdorf, but rather many other variations in the Sicilian, such as 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6. This structure is one of my favourites, as it provides a nice mix of tactical resources and strategic ideas. I grew up playing the English Attack against the Sicilian, and played this pawn structure many times. I enjoyed opposite flank attacks and most of my games took this direction for good or for bad. This chapter will not focus on these attacks. I will admit they are very exciting and complex, but they lack the strategic substance that constitutes the essence of this book. Instead we will focus on the strategy that hides behind the combinations. In this structure, all strategic plans are in some way connected to the control of the d5-square. As the reader can easily verify on his own, pretty much every successful attack in this position works out because such central control has been achieved. Now, let's examine how each side may fight for the d5-square:

White's plans

1. Place a knight on d5, and have enough pieces to always be able to recapture with a piece rather than a pawn.
2. Advance g2-g4-g5 expelling Black's knight on f6, a defender of the d5-square.
3. Play ♗g5xf6 to eliminate the knight defending the d5-square.
4. Play f2-f4-f5 preventing Black from placing his light-squared bishop on e6.

Black's plans

1. Break in the centre with ...d6-d5 and, by doing so, take over the initiative.
2. Press down the c-file, so that White cannot play ♘c3-d5 because of a vulnerable pawn on c2.
3. Play ...b7-b5-b4 expelling White's knight from c3 before ♘c3-d5 can be played.

Overall, I believe chances are approximately level. If things work out well for White, he will have pleasant control of the d5-square and he will be able to progress slowly, either positionally on the d-file, or tactically with a kingside pawn storm. On the other hand, if Black's strategy succeeds he will be able either to release his position with ...d6-d5, or favourably transfer into a Najdorf structure of Type I.

Variants of this structure

Throughout this chapter we will consider two other versions of this pawn structure. The first consists of White having a pawn on c4 rather than c2. Roughly speaking, this permanently

prevents the ...d6-d5 break, but instead gives Black the possibility to attack with ...b7-b5. The second version of this pawn structure consists of White having his f-pawn on f5 instead of f3. The main difference is that such a pawn provides better chances for a kingside attack, although the e4-pawn becomes more vulnerable.

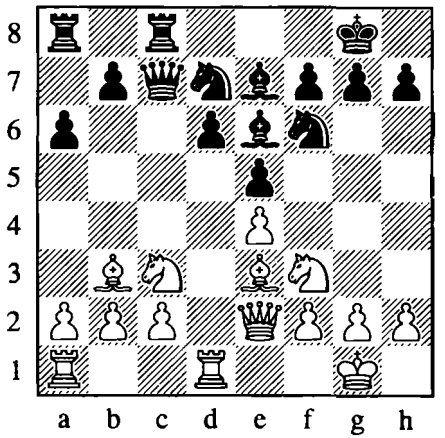
This chapter is organized around these three variants of the structure. The first two games are examples of the *standard* structure with the pawns on c2 and f3. The first game illustrates White's control of the d5-square while the second is an initial example of Black's central break with ...d6-d5. The next two games showcase White's c4-pawn. In the first, White gains a dominating position from the start and easily imposes his advantage, while the second is a complicated game in which Black gains enduring counterplay by breaking White's central hold with ...b7-b5. The last two games illustrate the structure with White's pawn on f5. In the first White successfully prevents the ...d6-d5 break and slowly grinds Black down, while in the second Black does manage to break in the centre with ...d6-d5 and obtains a quick and easy win.

Vladimir Akopian – Alexander Morozevich

Bursa 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates the typical fight between White's knight on d5 and Black's dark-squared bishop.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘f3 ♗e7 8.♗c4 0–0 9.0–0 ♕c7 10.♗b3 ♗e6 11.♕e2 ♖c8 12.♖fd1 ♘bd7



We reach a typical position of the structure under discussion. Black can dispute the control of the d5-square and chances are approximately balanced.

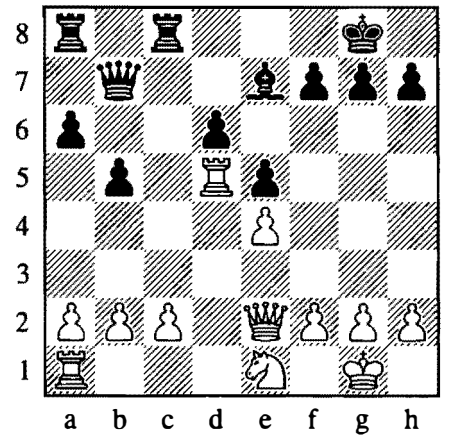
13.♗g5

The alternative 13.♘h4!? attempting to improve the knight via ♘h4-f5-e3-d5, could be met by 13...g6!?.

Or 13.♖ac1 ♗c4 14.♗xc4 ♕xc4 15.♕xc4 ♖xc4 16.♘d2 ♖c7 17.f3 where White's position seems somewhat preferable, as in the game Schaerer – Rojas Alarcon, Guimaraes 2012.

13...b5 14.♘e1 ♕b7 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 ♘xd5 18.♖xd5

But not 18.exd5? f5∓ when Black has a superior version of the previous chapter's structure, since White cannot expand on the queenside.



An interesting position. White has control of the d5-square and Black's bishop is restricted by its own pawns. However, White's knight is currently inactive on e1, and Black has good chances for counterplay based on the c-file. Overall, the position is approximately equal, though precise play is needed from Black in order to avoid falling into a passive position after a typical c2-c3, ♘c2-e3-d5 with a big advantage.

18...f5!?

Hoping to create counterplay along the f-file.

A good alternative was 18...♖c4 19.♖ad1 (but not 19.c3?! f5!) 19...♖ac8 when it is unclear how White can bring his knight to d5: 20.c3 (or 20.a3 a5) Hoping for ♘c2-e3/b4-d5, but after 20...b4! 21.cxb4 ♕xb4 22.f3 h5!? it remains unclear how White is to get his knight to d5.

19.♖ad1 fxe4 20.♕xe4 ♖c4 21.♕e2 ♖ac8

Better was 21...♖f8 22.c3 ♖cf4 23.f3 g5!? with mutual chances, for example 24.h3 h5 (threatening ...g5-g4) 25.♖xd6!? ♗xd6 26.♖xd6 ♕g7 27.♘d3 ♖4f6 28.♕xe5 g4!? with complications.

22.a3 b4?!

Wasting time on the queenside. This is inconsistent with 18...f5 and this imprecision allows White to consolidate.

It was not too late for 22...♖f4 23.c3 ♖cf8 24.f3 g5!? as above.

23.axb4

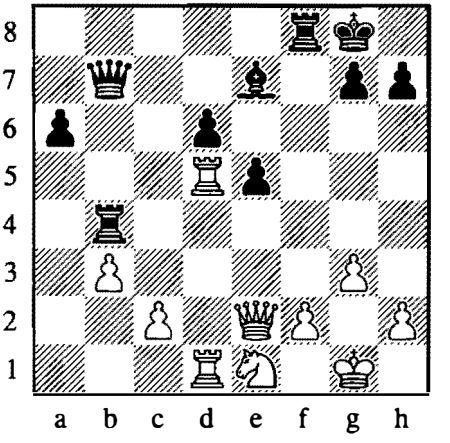
23.b3!? ♖4c6 24.axb4 ♕xb4 25.♖a1± also deserves attention.

23...♖xb4 24.b3 ♖f8

24...♖f4 is now met by 25.♘d3 ♖f6 (or 25...♕xd5? 26.♘xf4 ♕b7 27.♘d5±) 26.♘b2!± followed by ♘c4 pressing against the d6-pawn.

25.g3±

Covering the f4-square, and preparing ♘g2-e3-c4 (or d5). Black begins to experience problems, as his dark-squared bishop is rather passive and there are no clear targets in White's position.



25...a5

Black hopes to continue with ...a5-a4, trading his weak a-pawn and turning the c2-pawn into a potential target, but:

26.♘d3!

This is the right reaction. White will take advantage of the situation to bring the knight to the ideal d5-square.

The optimistic 26.♖xa5? is met by 26...♗d8! 27.♖aa1 ♗b6 when Black has excellent compensation for the pawn after 28.♘d3 ♖e4

29.♕f1 (29.♕d2 h5!∓ followed by ...h5-h4-h3) 29...♖g4 threatening ...e5-e4.

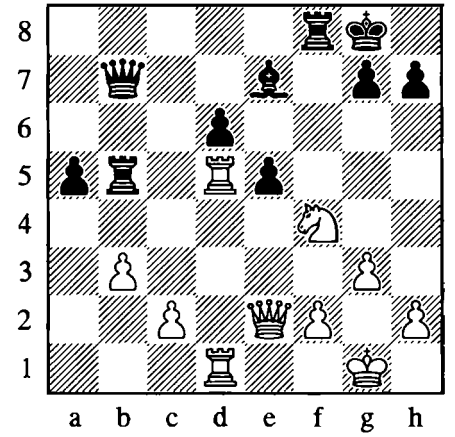
26...♖b5

Similar is 26...♕xd5 27.♘xb4 ♕b7 28.♘d5±.

But not 26...♖b6? 27.♘xe5! dxe5 28.♖d7 and wins.

27.♘f4!

Finding a route to d5.



27...♖b8?!

A careless move, leaving Black's monarch alone on the kingside.

Better was 27...♖xd5 28.♘xd5 ♗d8 when it is not so easy to parry Black's attempt to equalize with ...♗b6. For example 29.♔g2 ♗b6 30.f3 ♗d4 31.♕e4 when White has only a small advantage.

An alternative was 27...♖b4 enticing White's knight to return, but 28.♘e6! ♖b8 29.h4!? leaves Black's position rather fragile. For example: 29...a4 (29...♕d7? 30.♖xe5+– or 29...♕c8?! 30.♖xd6! ♗xd6 31.♖xd6 ♕e8 32.♕xe5+–) 30.bxa4 ♖xa4 31.♘c5! dxc5 32.♖d7 ♕e4 33.♕xe4 ♖xe4 34.♖xe7± Followed by doubling rooks on the 7th rank.

28.♖xb5 ♕xb5 29.♕e4

It makes sense to keep the queens on the board somewhat longer. After all, White's king is much safer than Black's.

The endgame after 29.♕xb5? ♖xb5 30.♘d5 ♔f7 is hardly good enough for White to win.

29...♕b4?!

Probably a miscalculation.

Safer was 29...♕c5 30.♘d5 ♗d8 but after 31.h4!? White dominates the board thanks to his strong knight on d5.

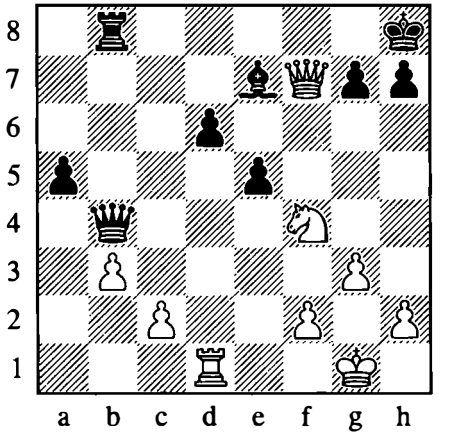
If 29...exf4 30.♕xe7 ♕e5 31.♕xd6 ♕xd6 32.♖xd6 fxg3 33.hxg3 with good winning chances.

30.♕d5† ♔h8

Of course not: 30...♔f8? 31.♘e6†! ♔e8 (or 31...♔g8 32.♘g5† ♔h8 33.♘f7† ♔g8 34.♘h6† ♔h8 35.♕g8† ♖xg8 36.♘f7#) 32.♘xg7†+–

31.♕f7!±

Penetrating into Black's camp, forcing material loss.



31...♕b7?!

Somewhat better was:

31...exf4 32.♕xe7 fxg3 33.hxg3 ♕c5!

The best defence.

33...a4?! 34.♖xd6! (threatening ♖d8 checkmating) 34...♖g8 35.bxa4 ♕xa4 36.♖d8!

Forcing the trade of rooks. 36...h6 (36...♕xc2?? 37.♖xg8† ♔xg8 38.♕e8#) 37.♖xg8† ♔xg8 38.♕e6† ♔f8 39.c4 And the queen endgame is winning.

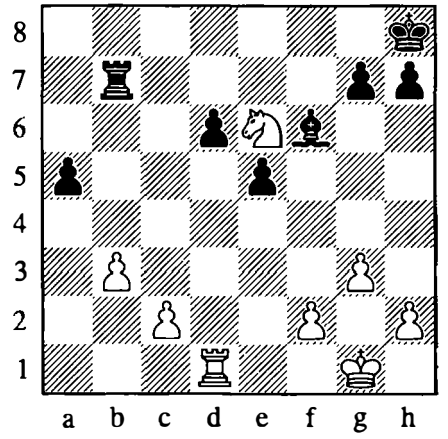
34.♕xd6 ♕xd6 35.♖xd6

Black has some drawing chances.

32.♘e6 ♗f6 33.♕xb7

An alternative is 33.♘d8!? ♕xf7 34.♘xf7† ♔g8 35.♘xd6 with a big advantage for White.

33...♖xb7



34.♖xd6

White is a full pawn up. In addition, his knight is more useful than Black's restricted dark-squared bishop, and the pawns on a5 and e5 are weak. Hence the advantage is nearly decisive.

34...♔g8 35.♖a6 ♖b5 36.♖c6

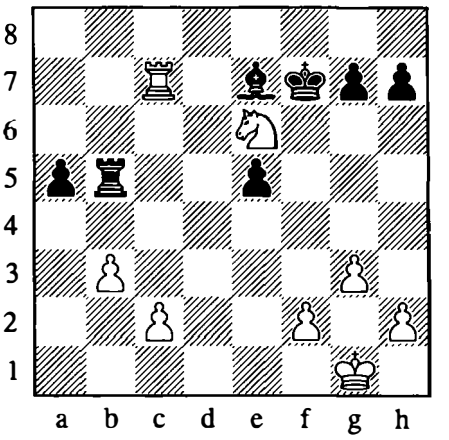
Planning to follow with ♘c5-e4 with full control of the board.

36...♗e7?!

Making things worse. Better was 36...♖d5 though White still has a huge advantage after 37.♔f1 ♔f7 38.♔e2.

37.♖c7 ♔f7

Instead 37...♗f6 admits the loss of tempo and after 38.♔f1 White's monarch will march to the queenside decisively.



38.♘xg7!+–

Winning a second pawn and the game.

38...e4 39.g4!

Bringing the knight back into the game via f5, with a winning position. The rest is simple.

39...♔f6

39...♖g5? fails to 40.♘f5 ♖xg4† 41.♔f1 winning the bishop.

40.♘f5 ♗d8 41.♖xh7 ♖c5 42.♘e3 ♔g6 43.♖a7 ♖c3 44.♖a6† ♔f7 45.h4 ♗xh4 46.♖xa5 1–0

Final remarks

1. It is often said that if White controls the d5-square and Black's only minor piece is the dark-squared bishop, then White should be positionally winning. This statement strongly depends on how far away White's knight is located. For example, after 18.♖d5 Black had two convincing ways to at least maintain equality since White's knight was on e1, very far away from the d5-square.
2. Despite the objective balance, starting on move 22 the game became easier for White to play, thus giving him a practical edge.

Alexander Kovchan – Denis Khismatullin

St Petersburg 2011

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's central break ...d6-d5 and how Black gains the initiative after it.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7 8.♗g5 ♗e6 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.♕d3 0–0 11.0–0

This move is rather unusual in this particular position.

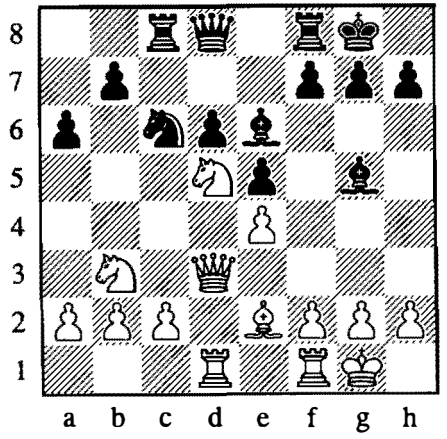
More common is 11.♖d1 ♘c6 12.♕xd6 ♘d4 13.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 14.♘xd4 (14.♗d3!?) 14...exd4 15.♘d5 ♗xd5 16.exd5 ♖xd5 when a draw was agreed in Kravtsiv – Ponomariov, Kiev 2013.

11.♗–0–0!? is also possible.

11...♘c6 12.♘d5 ♗g5

A standard move; the bishop proves useful on this diagonal.

13.♖ad1 ♖c8



14.c3

The try 14.c4, intending to reinforce the control of the d5-square, is met by 14...♘e7! threatening ...♘xd5, and now White does not have any useful moves. For example: 15.♘d2 (or 15.♘xe7† ♕xe7 when the c4-pawn is lost: 16.♕xd6 ♕xd6 17.♖xd6 ♗xc4∓) 15...♘xd5 16.cxd5 (16.exd5 ♗d7∓ followed by ...f7-f5 with an excellent version of the previous chapter's structure) 16...♗d7∓ Black's bishop on g5 secures good counterplay down the c-file.

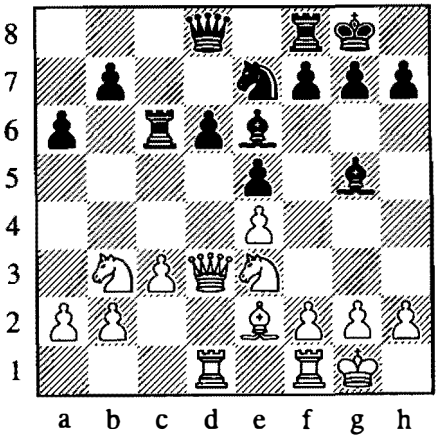
14...♘e7!

A standard manoeuvre, disputing the control of the key d5-square.

15.♘e3

If 15.♘xe7† ♗xe7 16.♘d2 ♕a5 17.a3 ♖fd8∓ threatening ...d6-d5 with an advantage for Black. In the event of 18.c4?! preventing ...d6-d5, Black now plays 18...♗g5 and the c4-pawn is very weak because of the threat of ...♗xd2 and ...♗xc4.

15...♖c6



16.♘d2?!

Too slow, losing control of d5 and allowing Black to take the initiative.

Better was 16.♗g4 ♕c7 17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.♖fe1 with level chances.

16...b5 17.♘f3 ♗xe3!

A good decision; now Black has more pieces to control the d5-square.

18.♕xe3 ♕c7 19.a3 f6

Protecting the e5-pawn and preparing the liberation with ...d6-d5.

Premature is 19...d5? 20.exd5 ♗xd5 21.♕xe5± winning a pawn.

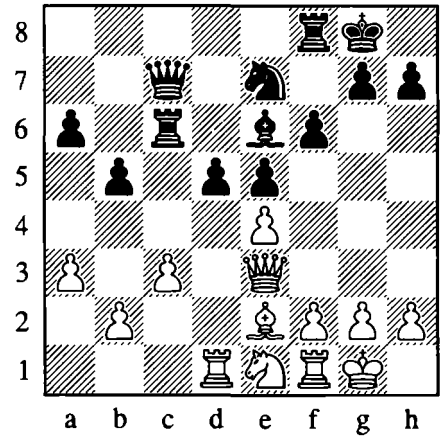
20.♘e1

White realizes he is no longer able to prevent the ...d6-d5 break, therefore he prepares to meet it with f2-f4 simplifying the position.

After the more natural 20.♖d2 d5 21.♗d3 (21.exd5?! gives Black some extra tempos: 21...♘xd5 22.♕e4 ♘f4∓) 21...♖d8 22.♖fd1 ♖cd6 Black's position is somewhat preferable, as the capture 23.exd5?! gives him a good position after 23...♘xd5 24.♕e4 g6 25.♗f1 ♘b6∓ and the b2-pawn will be vulnerable after ...♘a4 or ...♘c4.

20...d5!∓

Achieving the standard break; White is under pressure.



21.f4

21.exd5? aggravates the situation due to 21...♘xd5 22.♕d2 ♖d8 23.♘c2 ♖d7!∓ preparing 24...♘f4. White is in trouble as he cannot dispute the d-file and his pieces are not well coordinated.

21...exf4 22.♖xf4 ♘g6 23.♖f2 dxe4 24.♕xe4 ♗b3

Vacating the space for the rook.

25.♖d4 ♖e6 26.♕g4 ♘e5

An alternative was: 26...♖fe8 27.♘d3 ♗c4 28.♗f1 ♕e7∓

27.♕g3 ♕e7 28.♘f3 ♘xf3† 29.♕xf3 ♖e8

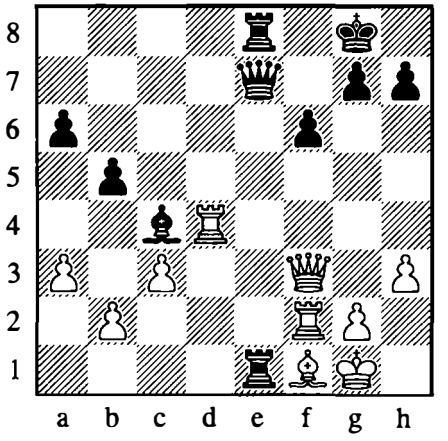
Simplifying the position has not completely solved White's problems.

30.♗f1 ♖e1 31.h3?

A tactical imprecision; now White is tied to the bishop on f1.

The correct move was 31.g3!∓ followed by ♔g2, with a slightly inferior but defensible position.

31...♗c4!∓



White's position becomes very difficult.

32.♖d1

It is not possible to get out of the pin with 32.♔h2? because of 32...♕e5†! and there is nothing better than going back into the cage with 33.♔g1 (33.♕f4? fails to 33...♖xf1 34.♖xf1 ♗xf1–+).

32...♕c5

Threatening ...♗xf1 winning.

33.b4

This weakening move is a sad necessity.

If 33.♖xe1 ♖xe1 34.♔h2 ♕e5†! 35.g3 ♗xf1

36.♖xf1 ♕e2†! 37.♕xe2 ♖xe2† 38.♔g1 ♖xb2∓ Black has excellent winning chances.

33...♕g5 34.♖xe1 ♖xe1 35.♔h2 ♕e5† 36.g3 ♗xf1 37.♖xf1 ♖e3 38.♕a8†

After 38.♕g2 h5 39.♖f3 ♖e4∓ Black stays in control of the game (of course not 39...♖xc3? 40.♖xc3 ♕xc3 41.♕d5†! with perpetual check).

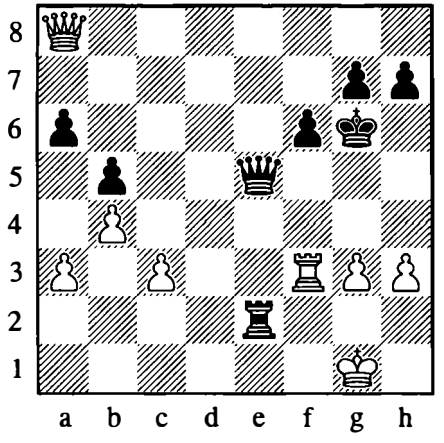
38...♔f7 39.♖f3?

The decisive mistake. A better defence was 39.♕g2 but Black is nearly winning after: 39...h5 40.h4 ♖xc3∓

39...♖e2† 40.♔g1 ♔g6!→

White probably missed this strong prophylactic move, threatening 41...♖d2, followed by 42...♕e1 mating.

But not 40...♖d2? 41.♕a7† as this check saves White: 41...♔g6 42.♕e3 holding the game for longer.



41.♕a7 ♖e1† 42.♔g2

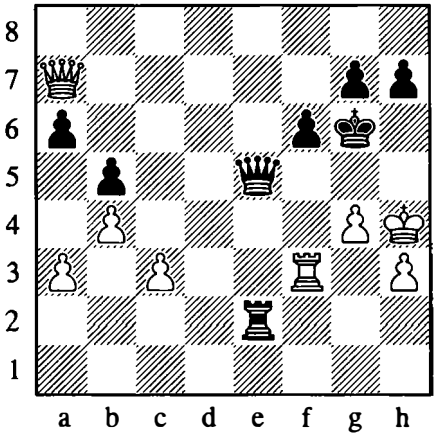
Or 42.♔h2 ♕e4! and Black wins after either 43.♔g2 ♖e2† or 43.♕f2 ♖e2.

42...♕e4!

Threatening ...♖e2 winning the rook on f3.

43.g4 ♖e2† 44.♔g3 ♕e5† 45.♔h4

45.♖f4 ♖e3† and wins.



45...♔h6!

White resigned because of the threat of ...g7-g5#.

0–1

Final remarks

1. The key to Black's strategy was the ability to control the d5-square with more pieces. For this purpose, the moves ...♗g5 and ...♗xe3 were essential.
2. The ...d6-d5 break changes the structure into a 3–3 vs. 4–2 pawn structure which is often balanced. Hence, from a structural perspective this break offers nothing special for Black. What is important about this break is how well placed are Black's pieces immediately after it. In this case, Black's forces were ready to grab the initiative and gain the open file. This is what decided the game.

Sergei Tiviakov – Viswanathan Anand

Germany 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of how White can gain a steady control of the d5-square after c2-c4 is played.
2. White goes on to dominate the board, and this game shows how to convert such an advantage into a full point.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5† ♘d7 4.d4 cxd4 5.♕xd4 a6 6.♗xd7† ♗xd7 7.c4 e5 8.♕d3

We have reached the thematic position. In contrast to the previous games, the pawns on c4 and e4 automatically secure control of the d5-square for White. Hence Black should find very concrete counterplay in order to avoid a passive position.

8...h6?!

This is a logical move; Black wants to develop his knight without having to worry about the positional threat of ♗g5xf6, but this is just too slow and this move has disappeared from top play.

Nowadays 8...b5! is the preferred move; it was employed for example in the game Carlsen – Anand, Sandes 2013. In the next game we will study a very similar position.

If 8...♘f6?! 9.♗g5! followed by ♘c3 and ♗xf6, gaining a long-term advantage due to the control of the d5-square.

9.♘c3 ♘f6 10.0–0 ♗e7

As Tiviakov points out, 10...b5?! 11.cxb5 axb5 12.♘xb5 ♘xe4? does not work because of: 13.♕xe4 ♗xb5 14.♘xe5!+–

11.a4

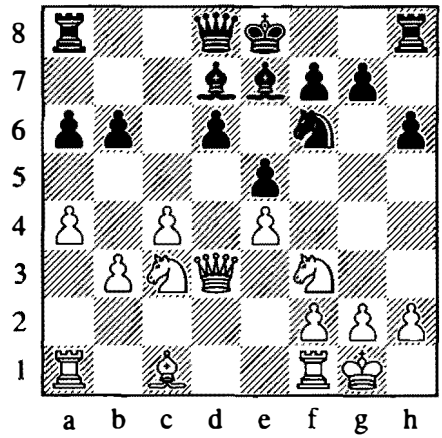
Further preventing the key ...b7-b5 break. White should not worry about the weakening of the b4-square, as Black cannot make use of it.

11...b6?

As GM Tiviakov pointed out in his analysis, this move is a key mistake for two reasons. First, the b6-pawn will become a weakness, and second, this imprecision gives White just enough time to play b2-b3 followed by ♗a3 with pressure against d6.

Better was: 11...0–0 12.♗e3 (now there is no time for 12.b3?! due to 12...b5! 13.axb5 [or 13.cxb5 axb5 14.♘xb5 ♗xb5 15.♕xb5 ♘xe4] 13...axb5 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 15.cxb5 ♖b8 with equal chances in Dobrowolski – Miton, Lubniewice 2005) 12...♕c7 13.a5 ♖ac8 14.b3 ♗e6 Black had a playable position in Mastrovasilis – Indjic, Kragujevac 2013.

12.b3



After this move Black is permanently restricted, since the ...b6-b5 break is well prevented, the d6-pawn is weak, and the d5-square is under White's control.

12...♖a7

Intending to protect the d6-pawn after a future ...♖d7.

Another option was 12...♗c6 13.♗a3 ♖a7 14.♖fd1 ♖d7 15.♘d2 followed by the standard ♘f1-e3-d5 with positional dominance, as in the game Petr – Duda, Czech Championship 2012.

More normal was 12...♕c7 13.♗a3 ♖d8 14.♖fd1 ♗c8 and now 15.♗b4!?± preparing a4-a5, with promising chances for White.

13.♖d1

Threatening to win a pawn with ♗a3 followed by ♗xd6.

13...♗c8

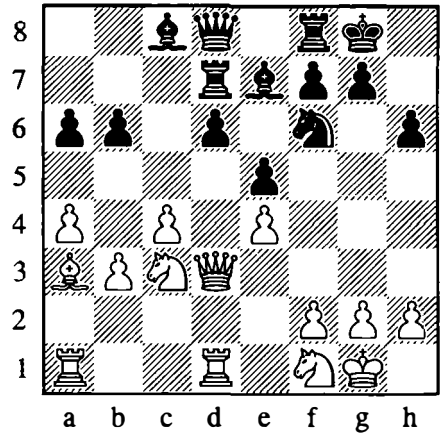
Too passive, as the bishop is not of much use on c8.

The alternative 13...♗g4 seems reasonable, trying to eliminate the knight before it becomes active with the typical ♘d2-f1-e3-d5, however after 14.♗a3 ♖d7 15.♖d2 White has a big advantage anyway. A possible threat is ♘e1-c2-e3-d5.

14.♗a3 ♖d7 15.♘d2

Taking the route ♘d2-f1-e3-d5. An alternative route was 15.♘e1!? followed by ♘c2-e3-d5.

15...0–0 16.♘f1



16...♗b7

It makes sense to try 16...♘h5!? hoping for counterplay after ...♘f4-e6. However, after the precise 17.g3! covering the f4-square, the knight is useless on h5, while White has not created any weaknesses that Black can take advantage of. 17...♗b7 18.♘e3 ♘f6 19.♘f5± with a dominating position.

17.♘e3 ♖e8

Here again 17...♘h5 18.♘ed5 ♗g5± was called for (18...♘f4 19.♕e3 ♘xd5 20.♘xd5 ♗xd5 21.♖xd5 f5 22.♖ad1 fxe4 23.♕xe4 ♖f4 24.♕e2±).

18.♘cd5 ♘xd5 19.♘xd5 ♗xd5

More principled was 19...♗g5 hoping to do something useful with the dark-squared bishop, but after 20.g3!? followed by h2-h4, the bishop will probably have to return to e7.

20.♕xd5±

White has achieved a typical dream position for this structure. All of Black's pieces are very passive and the d6-pawn is permanently weak.

Of course not 20.cxd5? losing the strong d5-square and giving safety to the d6-pawn. Black would reply 20...♕a8! (Tiviakov) followed by placing rooks on the c-file with excellent chances to hold a draw.

20...♕a8?!

Not a good practical decision, as now White can expand his kingside without any worries.

The move 20...♗g5? hoping to play ...♖e6 protecting the d6-pawn, is met by 21.a5! (or 21.♕c6!? as suggested by Tiviakov, with the idea of ♖d5 followed by ♖ad1) 21...bxa5 22.c5 ♕a8 23.cxd6 when the passed pawn on d6 should decide the game.

Preferable is 20...♕c8!? keeping queens on the board, in case a chance for counterplay arises.

21.♕xa8 ♖xa8 22.♖d5 f6

Similar is 22...♖c8 23.♖ad1 ♖c6 24.g3 intending to follow up with f2-f4-f5, but not: 24.♖xe5? dxe5 25.♖xd7 ♗xa3–+

23.♖ad1 ♖ad8 24.g3!

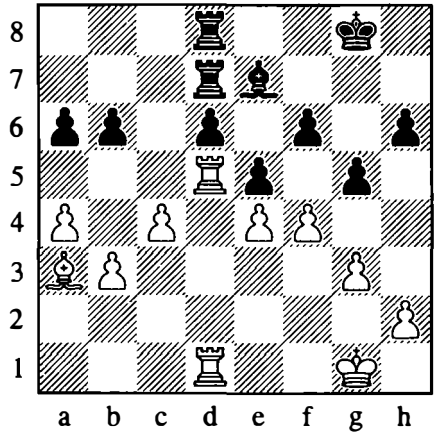
The plan is f2-f4-f5, restraining even more the action of Black's dark-squared bishop.

24...g5

If 24...♔f7 25.f4 g6 26.f5 gxf5 27.exf5 White has a huge advantage, and may proceed with ♔f2-f3, ♗c1-e3, g3-g4 and h2-h4. Meanwhile, there is little for Black to do.

25.f4!

Provoking the creation of more weaknesses.



25...gxf4 26.gxf4 ♔f7 27.♔f2

A prophylactic move against ...♖g8-g4.

Premature is 27.f5? ♖g8† 28.♔f2 ♖g4 when White has lost most of his advantage, for example: 29.♖e1 ♖f4† 30.♔g2 ♖d8!?

27...exf4

A very sad decision, accepting the creation of new weaknesses on f6 and h6.

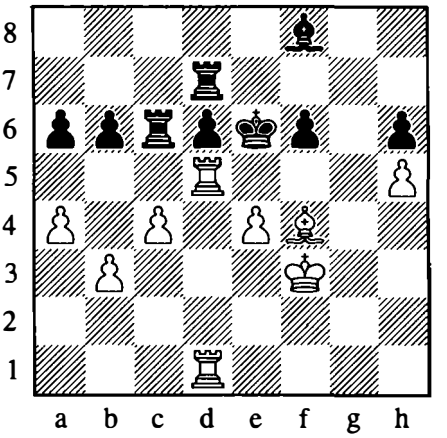
Waiting with 27...h5 also does not help. For example, 28.♔f3 ♔e6 29.f5† ♔f7 30.♖g1 ♖g8 31.♖xg8 ♔xg8 32.♔g3! followed by ♔h4, threatening the h5-pawn.

28.♔f3 ♔e6 29.♗c1 ♖c8 30.♗xf4 ♗f8 31.h4

Followed by h4-h5, fixing the h6-pawn on the colour of the attacking bishop.

31...♖c6 32.h5+–

The game is won for White, and the rest is an exhibition of Tiviakov's endgame technique.



32...♖b7 33.♗e3

Rather than searching for direct ways to realize the advantage, White should slowly improve each one of his pieces. In this case, the bishop on d4 is strong, pressing against the b6- and f6-pawns.

33...♖b8 34.♗d4 ♖c7 35.♖g1 ♗g7

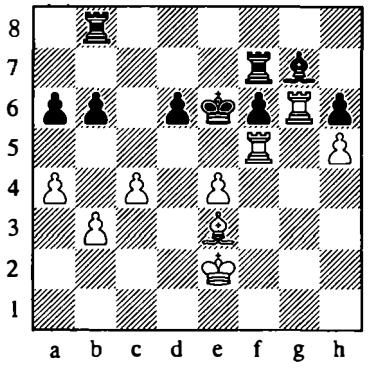
Or 35...♖g7 36.♖g6! ♖f7 (but not 36...♖xg6?! 37.hxg6+– with a strong passed pawn; even White's king is a threat after ♔g4-h5) 37.♖f5+– is similar to the game.

36.♖g6 ♖f7 37.♗e3 ♖d7 38.♖f5

Much better was 38.e5! winning directly: 38...♔f7 (but not 38...dxe5? 39.♖xd7 ♔xd7 40.♖xg7†+–) 39.exf6+– since 39...♗xf6? loses to 40.♖f5.

38...♖f7 39.♔g4

More logical was 39.♔e2!?:



This will be followed by ♔d3-c3, b3-b4-b5, etc. White's queenside pawns have much more winning potential than the h5-pawn, thus it makes sense to play on this flank.

39...♗f8 40.♗xh6 ♗xh6 41.♖xh6 ♖g7†

A much better defence was 41...♖g8†! 42.♖g6 ♖xg6† 43.hxg6 ♖f8 though White should still be winning after 44.a5!.

42.♔f4 ♖f8 43.a5

White is winning and I leave the rest of the game without annotations, as it bears no relevance to the topic of this chapter.

43...♖g1 44.axb6 ♖b1 45.b7 ♖xb3 46.e5 dxe5† 47.♖xe5† ♔d6 48.♖f5 ♔e6 49.♖h7 ♖d8 50.♖d5
1–0

Final remarks

1. Black accepted an inferior position when he missed his chance to play 8...b5 to challenge White's centre. Later he worsened his position with the weakening (or at least useless) 11...b6.
2. Around move 16 Black should have played ...♘h5 in order to attempt ...f7-f5 or ...♗g5 to create reasonable counterplay. Instead, trading knights on d5 eliminated his chances to create any serious threats later in the game.
3. The moves 19...♗xd5 and 20...♕a8 only crystallized White's advantage by reducing the fight down to just the protagonists of the positional imbalance. Black's weak d6-pawn, and the qualitative difference between White's active bishop on a3 and Black's passive bishop on e7, reduced Black's chances to a minimum. White won the endgame convincingly, as there was little Black could do to hold it.

Viktor Bologan – Veselin Topalov

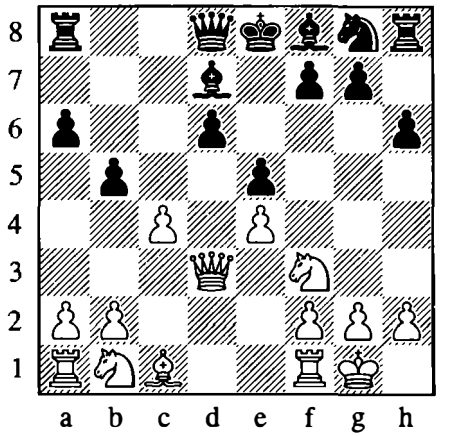
Eilat 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game exemplifies how Black should react against the typical c2-c4, by playing ...b7-b5.
2. Throughout the game Black manages to find counterplay by using the dark squares and simply playing *around* White's knight on d5.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5† ♘d7 4.0–0 a6 5.♗xd7† ♗xd7 6.d4 cxd4 7.♕xd4 e5 8.♕d3 h6 9.c4 b5!

As we learned in the previous game, Black must respond actively in order not to fall into submission.



10.♘fd2

Preventing 10...bxc4 followed by 11...♗b5.

If 10.♘c3 bxc4 11.♕xc4 ♘f6 12.♖d1 ♗e6 13.♕d3 ♗e7 Black has a good position, and may even fight for the initiative. For example: 14.b3 0–0 15.♗a3?! ♕a5∓ Maze – Kraemer, Germany 2013.

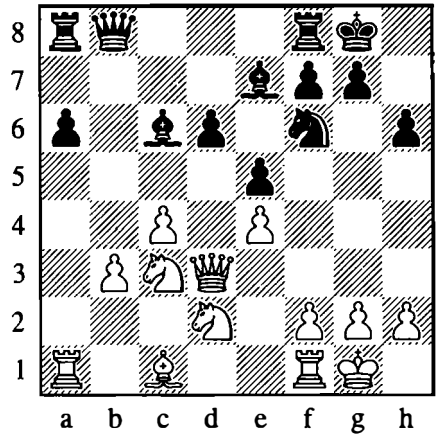
10...♘f6

But not 10...bxc4? 11.♘xc4 as the d6-pawn becomes an easy target.

11.♘c3 ♕b8

It is not beneficial for Black to keep the queenside closed with 11...b4 12.♘d5 ♘xd5 13.♕xd5 as White can regroup his pieces and place a knight on d5, or press against the weak d6-pawn.

12.a4 bxa4 13.♘xa4 ♗e7 14.♘c3 0–0 15.b3 ♗c6



The structure is practically the same as in the previous game, but there are three key differences that should be noted:

1. The b-file is open for Black to create counterplay.
2. If White places a knight on d5, Black will capture ...♘xd5 (or ...♗xd5) forcing White to occupy the d5-square with a pawn. That means White does not have full control of the d5-square. At the moment White cannot proceed with ♘f1-e3-d5 since the b3-pawn is hanging.
3. White cannot easily expand on the queenside, since Black is ready to play ...a6-a5 covering the b4-square.

16.♗a3 a5

Preventing b3-b4, which allows Black to claim some space on the queenside and maintain equality.

If 16...♖d8 17.b4 ♕b7 18.♖fe1 ♖ac8 19.♘b3!? White may follow with ♘a5 and possibly regroup his bishop to e3 with a small advantage.

17.♖fd1 ♖d8 18.f3 ♖a7!?

The position is rather unclear and flexible. Both sides have multiple options for manoeuvring without altering the evaluation significantly.

19.♔h1 ♖b7 20.♖db1 ♖c8 21.♖d1 ♖d8 22.♖a2 ♘d7 23.♕c2?!

Misplacing the queen.

A better piece arrangement is 23.♖b1 ♘f8 24.♗c1 ♘e6!? (24...♖a7 is somewhat slow: 25.♘f1 ♘e6 26.♗e3 ♘c5 27.♗xc5 dxc5 28.♘d5±) 25.♖xa5 ♘c5 26.♕c2 ♗g5 with an unclear position.

White does not gain much from 23.♘d5 ♗g5∞ followed by ...♘f8-e6-d4.

Now Black starts to gain the initiative after:

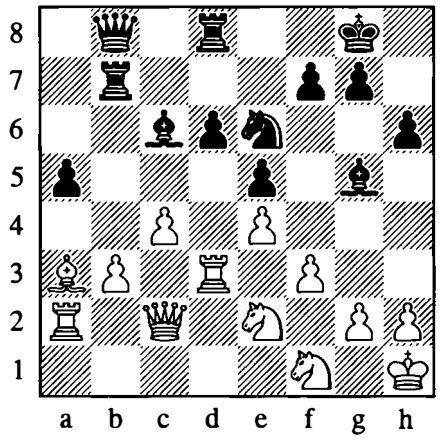
23...♗g5 24.♘f1 ♘f8

To be followed by ...♘e6-d4.

25.♘e2

Or 25.♘g3 ♘e6 26.♘ge2 ♗e3 when Black has a good position.

25...♘e6 26.♖d3



26...♕a7?!

Imprecise. Better was 26...♘c5 27.♗xc5 dxc5 28.♖xd8† ♕xd8∓ and the opening of the d-file is something else for White to worry about.

27.♕d1

As Stohl suggests, better was 27.♖xd6 keeping the balance: 27...♖xd6 28.♗xd6 ♕f2 29.♕b1 h5!? with compensation for the pawn.

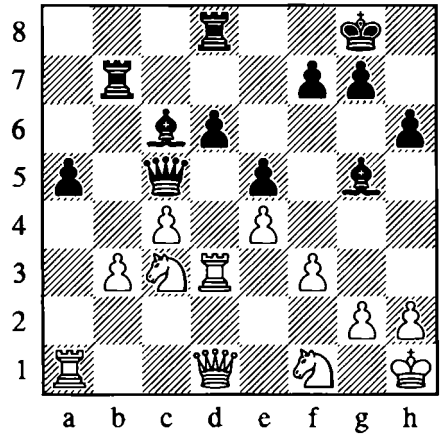
27...♕b6 28.♖a1

It is no longer possible to play 28.♖xd6? because of 28...♖xd6 29.♗xd6 (29.♕xd6? ♖d7 trapping the queen) 29...♖d7 when the bishop is lost after ...♗b7 and ...♖xd6.

28...♕f2

An alternative was: 28...♘c5 29.♗xc5 dxc5 This is the point, opening the d-file. (29...♕xc5 was an alternative) 30.♖xd8† ♕xd8 31.♕xd8† ♗xd8 32.♖a3 ♖d7∓ White's position is quite delicate.

29.♘c3 ♘c5 30.♗xc5 ♕xc5



The reader should notice how small a role the d5-square has played throughout the game. Thanks to the b-file and the potential ...a5-a4 break, White cannot take control of the game as in the previous example.

31.♘d5 ♖db8 32.♘fe3 g6 33.h3 h5 34.♕c2 h4!?

A double-edged decision, gaining control of g3, but allowing a knight transfer to g4.

An option was 34...a4!? 35.b4 ♖xb4 36.♘xb4 ♖xb4∓ when White has problems all over the board, giving Black more than enough compensation for the exchange.

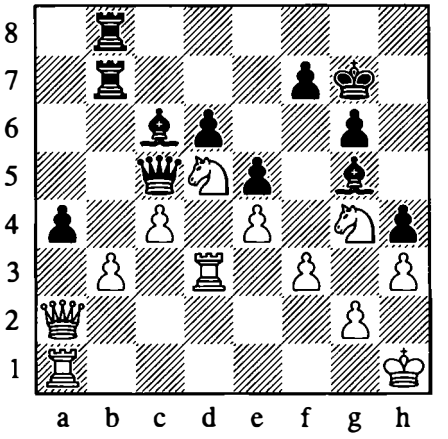
35.♕a2 ♔g7 36.♘g4

The a5-pawn is immune: 36.♕xa5? ♕xa5 37.♖xa5 ♖xb3 38.♖xb3 ♖xb3 White cannot avoid material loss, for example: 39.♖a6 (39.♘f1?! ♖b1 40.♔g1 ♗xd5 41.♖xd5 ♗e3†–+) 39...♗b7 40.♖a7 ♗xe3 41.♘xe3 ♗xe4! winning a pawn.

36...a4!?

A good practical chance.

An alternative was: 36...♗xd5 37.♖xd5 ♕c6 38.♕xa5 ♖xb3∓



37.f4?

A serious mistake, possibly made under time trouble.

Necessary was 37.b4 ♖xb4 38.♘xb4 ♖xb4 when Black has good compensation for the exchange due to the passed a4-pawn and his powerful pair of bishops. For example: 39.♖c3 (the natural 39.♖ad1? runs into 39...♖xc4 40.♖xd6 ♖c1! winning material due to the threat 40...♕xd6, and 41.♖xc1? loses by force after 41...♕xc1†

42.♔h2 ♗f4† 43.g3 hxg3† 44.♔g2 ♗b5–+) 39...f5!? With active play.

37...♖xb3–+

Black is winning, and the rest is easy.

38.♖xb3 axb3 39.♕b2 ♗xd5 40.♘xe5 dxe5 0–1

Final remarks

1. The ...b7-b5 break was essential. It creates an open file for counterplay. Later, playing ...a6-a5 was essential to prevent a queenside expansion, and to keep the b3-pawn vulnerable.
2. White did get full control of the d5-square after all, but it did not matter much because his dark squares were too weak, which gave Black enough counterplay.
3. The key to Black's success was his ideal piece arrangement. Black's bishop was quite useful on the g5-square, and the knight transfer ...♘f8-e6-d4 was always a strong idea. Black had so many resources for counterplay that White's control of the d5-square made little impact and did not prevent the creation of multiple threats.
4. Overall, Black's play was a model for how to conduct this type of position, and to prove that Black has sufficient resources for counterplay provided he opens some lines and keeps his pieces active.

Zoltan Almasi – Jacob Aagaard

Istanbul Olympiad 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an illustration of White's many resources once the f4-f5 advance has been achieved.
2. This game has two very marked phases, which could even be studied independently:

A) Between the beginning of the middlegame and up to move 27, this example illustrates how powerful White's attacking chances are when associated with a g4-g5 break. This attack has a strong positional foundation, because White not only attacks on the kingside, but also gains a better control of d5, as Black's f6 knight is driven away.

B) The second phase of the game starts from Black's 27th move, which is the transition to an endgame. The rest of the analysis is devoted to explaining White's winning plans and Black's best defensive resources.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.♕f3 ♕a5

Going for a relatively rare sideline. The standard move 8...♕c7 is preferable.

9.0–0–0 ♗d7 10.g4 ♘c6 11.♘b3 ♕c7 12.♗h4 h6 13.♗g3

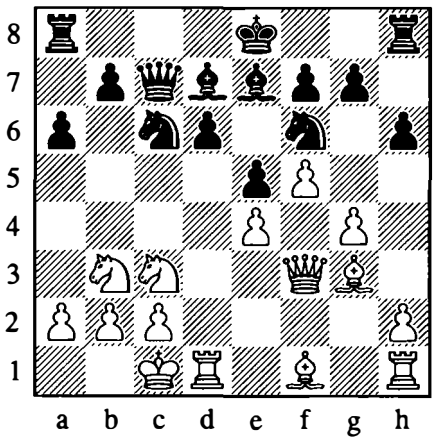
White's precise play puts in doubt the value of Black's 8th move.

13...e5?!

More standard was 13...0–0–0 14.h4 ♗e8 15.g5 ♘d7 16.♗h3± with an initiative for White, as in Ljubojevic – Polgar, Moscow (ol) 1994.

Instead 13...b5? is met by 14.e5! since after 14...dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘h7 the strong 16.♘d5! leaves Black in a desperate position.

14.f5



White reaches the thematic position under very favourable circumstances. His pieces are well organized and there exist both strategic and dynamic elements in his favour. The kingside attack based on h2-h4 followed by g4-g5 is much faster than Black's counterplay on the queenside. In addition, Black's pieces are not well prepared to fight for the control of the key d5-square, in particular note how ineffective the bishop is on d7. This gives White chances to fight for the win positionally, either in the middlegame or in an eventual endgame.

14...♖c8?

Necessary was:

14...b5!

To be followed with ...b5-b4 disputing the control of the d5-square.

15.h4 b4

Necessary, preventing the strong threat 16.g5 ♘g8 17.♘d5.

16.♘d5

If 16.♘e2? ♘a5!∓ with the strong threats 17...♘xe4 or 17...♗c6.

16...♘xd5 17.exd5

But not 17.♖xd5? a5 followed by ...a5-a4-a3 with excellent counterplay for Black.

17...♘a5 18.♘xa5 ♕xa5 19.♔b1±

We have transposed to the previous chapter's structure, though Black's current position is actually quite bad, since the typical ...f7-f5 is not available and White's kingside attack is promising.

15.♔b1?!

A very natural prophylactic move, moving away from the c-file. Unfortunately, it is a serious imprecision missing the strong 15.h4!.

Black is in serious trouble after 15.h4! preparing g4-g5 followed by ♘c3-d5, gaining great attacking chances. Black does not have a satisfactory reply. For example 15...♘b4 threatening 16...♘xa2, is simply answered by 16.♖h2 protecting c2, possibly followed by a2-a3 and g4-g5; then 16...a5 17.a3 a4 18.♘a1 ♘c6 19.g5 ♘g8 20.♘d5+– when Black's position is lost both tactically and strategically.

15...♘a5 16.h4 ♗c6

Improving the bishop, controlling d5, and threatening 17...♗xe4.

The alternative 16...♘xb3 17.axb3 (worse is 17.cxb3?! b5 18.b4 a5!∞) 17...♗c6 18.♖h2 gives White a big advantage, due to the strong control of the d5-square and the chance of a g4-g5 break.

17.♗d3

Protecting e4, and preparing the g4-g5 break.

But not 17.g5? ♗xe4! as Black is winning after 18.♘xe4 ♕xc2† 19.♔a1 ♘xe4.

The optimistic 17.♘xa5? hoping to follow after 17...♕xa5 with 18.♗c4, is met by 17...♗xe4!–+ winning material.

17.♖h2! was also strong, preparing 18.♘xa5 followed by g4-g5.

17...♘d7?!

Inaccurate, allowing White to activate his light-squared bishop.

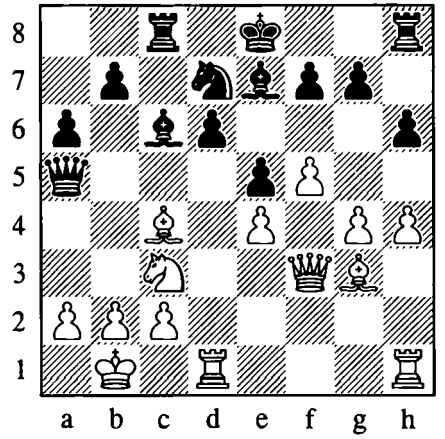
Better was: 17...♘xb3 18.cxb3! Now this recapture is a nice (and standard) choice, opening the c-file for White while maintaining control of the key d5-square. In fact, Black will generally avoid taking on b3, because of this recapture, but

in this case the standard 18...b5! is better than usual, as it prevents the light-squared bishop from becoming active and, of course, it threatens ...b5-b4 disputing the d5-square: 19.♖c1 ♕b7 20.b4± Black's position is worse, but remains playable due to his potential activity on the queenside; for example, after a typical ...a6-a5 break, followed by ...b5-b4. Unfortunately for Black, the standard liberation by 20...d5? is not possible because of: 21.exd5 ♘xd5 22.♘xd5 ♗xd5 23.♖xc8†+–

18.♘xa5 ♕xa5 19.♗c4

A standard decision; the bishop is better on b3.

White had fine attacking chances after: 19.g5!? b5 (19...hxg5? only aggravates Black's problems after 20.hxg5 ♖xh1 21.♕xh1 followed by ♕h8 with a decisive attack) 20.♕g4!?± Black's position is fragile, and it is clear that his queenside attack is going nowhere.



19...b5 20.♗b3 ♕c7

Instead 20...b4 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 (21...♘c5 22.f6+–) 22.♗xd5± keeps Black under control.

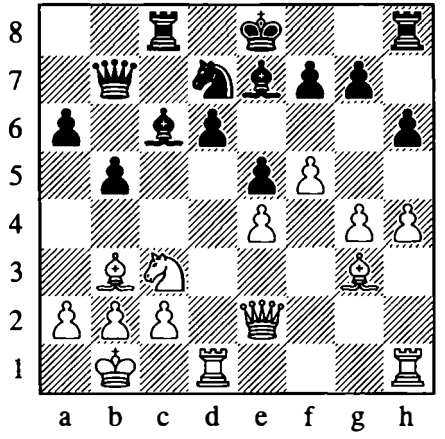
21.♕e2

An option was 21.f6!? but after 21...gxf6! there is no immediate way to continue the attack (but not 21...♗xf6? 22.g5+–).

White had a powerful attack after 21.g5! b4 (or 21...♘c5 22.♘d5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5 with complete control and a powerful attack) 22.♕h5! (22.♘d5!?) 22...bxc3 23.♕xf7† ♔d8 24.♕xg7 ♖e8 25.f6 ♗f8 26.♕g6 with more than sufficient compensation.

21...♕b7

Or 21...b4 22.♘d5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5 with a big advantage for White.



22.♗f2?!

White seems so eager to go into a superior endgame, that he completely disregards his wonderful attacking chances.

Again, the position was asking for 22.g5! ♘c5 (it is never good to capture 22...hxg5? 23.hxg5 ♖xh1 24.♖xh1+–) 23.f6!± and Black is in serious trouble.

22...♘f6 23.♖he1 b4 24.♘d5 ♗b5

The alternative 24...♘xd5 25.♗xd5 ♗xd5 26.♖xd5± is terrible for Black, as there is no counterplay and the potential g4-g5 break remains strong.

25.♕f3?!

This imprecision is hard to understand from such a strong player. Fortunately for us, Almasi's mistake gives us the gift of a very interesting endgame to study.

Better was 25.♘xf6† gxf6 (or 25...♗xf6 26.♕d2 ♗e7 27.g5±) 26.♕d2± followed by ♗d5, ♖c1 and c2-c3 opening the queenside advantageously, since Black's king does not have a safe place to hide.

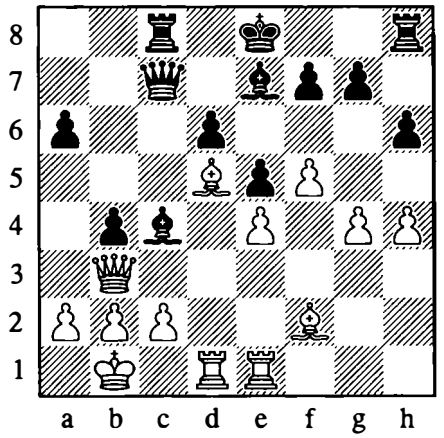
25...♘xd5 26.♗xd5 ♕c7 27.♕b3

White should have kept the queens on with 27.♖d2 ♗c4 28.♗xc4 ♕xc4 29.♕d1!? followed by ♖d5. He can slowly improve his position, maybe prepare g4-g5 or simply trade queens once conditions are favourable.

27...♗c4

But not 27...0–0? 28.g5! threatening g5-g6, while taking the pawn would be suicidal as it opens Black's castled position. 28...♗c4 (28...hxg5?! 29.hxg5 ♗xg5? 30.♖g1 ♗f6 31.♖h1+–) 29.♗xc4 ♕xc4 30.♕xc4 ♖xc4 31.f6±

An endgame now comes into view and this marks the beginning of the second phase of this game.



28.♕a4†

The b4-pawn is untouchable: 28.♕xb4?? ♗xd5 29.exd5 ♕xc2† 30.♔a1 ♕xf2–+

28...♗b5 29.♕b3

Again: 29.♕xb4?? ♕xc2† 30.♔a1 ♕xf2–+

29...♗c4 30.♗xc4 ♕xc4

An important moment in the game. Over the last several moves White has disregarded many good tactical opportunities in order to reach a superior endgame. Is this approach correct? In my opinion it is not. The resulting endgame, although superior for White, offers Black good chances to survive, as we will analyze.

31.♖d5!

The best option. Instead 31.♕xc4? ♖xc4 32.♖d5 ♔d7 leaves White in a position that, although preferable, contains few winning chances since a queenside expansion is impossible.

31...♔d7?!

This move gives White an extra opportunity to keep queens on the board.

The correct reaction was:

31...♕xb3! 32.axb3 ♖c6 33.♖ed1

Threatening ♗e1xb4.

Black would like to react with 33...♔d7 34.♗e1 ♖b8, but 33...♔d7 is refuted by 34.♖xe5. Hence:

33...h5!

Another option was 33...0–0 34.♗e1 ♖b8 with reasonable chances to hold the game.

34.g5 f6 35.g6

Or 35.gxf6 gxf6 36.♖g1 ♔f7 37.♗e1 ♖b8 with good chances to hold the endgame.

35...♔d7

This is the point! The e5-pawn is now immune.

36.♖a5 ♖hc8 37.♖d2 ♗d8

Black should have no problems drawing this endgame.

32.♖a5

An interesting computer-like move was 32.♕a4† ♖c6 33.♗c5! when the complications seem to favour White, though it would be difficult to evaluate in a real game.

32...♕xb3 33.axb3

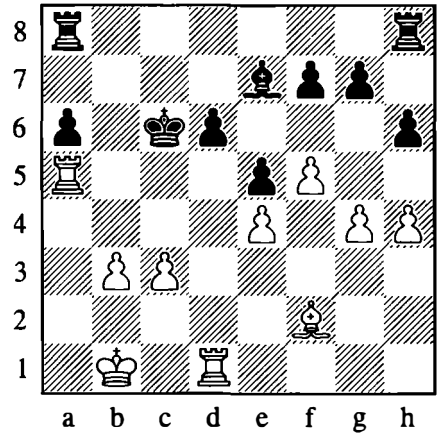
Or 33.cxb3 ♖c6 34.♖d1 ♖hc8 which gives Black good defensive resources as 35.♖xe5? is well met by 35...♖c2 36.♗b6 ♗f6 with the initiative.

33...♖a8?

Losing control of the c-file, and allowing the key c2-c3 advance.

Instead 33...♖c6 34.♖a4 ♖b8 makes it difficult for White to progress as c2-c3 is both necessary and very difficult to carry out: 35.♖d1 ♗d8 36.♖d5 a5 when there is no trace of White's once huge advantage.

34.♖d1 ♔c6 35.c3 bxc3 36.bxc3

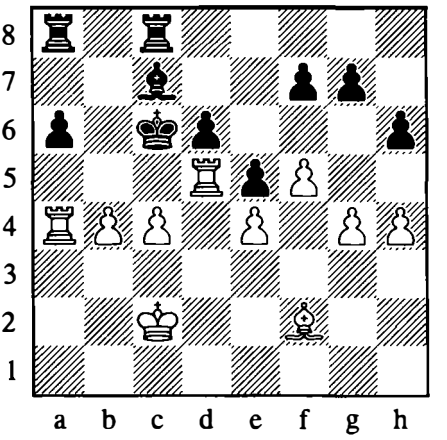


White is getting back on track for winning the game. He will now expand with b3-b4 and c3-c4, increasing his dominance and gaining the potential breaks b4-b5 and c4-c5. The following moves are rather schematic, and many different orders would have lead to pretty much the same outcome.

36...♔b7 37.♖a4 ♖hc8

Trying to create counterplay is not simple. For example: 37...♖hg8 (with the idea ...g7-g6) 38.c4 ♔c6 Protecting the d6-pawn (or 38...g6 39.f6! ♗xf6 40.♖xd6). 39.b4 g6 40.♖xa6†! A nice tactical blow! 40...♖xa6 41.b5† ♔b7 42.bxa6† ♔xa6 43.f6!+–

38.♖b4† ♔c6 39.♔c2 ♗d8 40.♖a4 ♔c7 41.♖d5 ♔c6 42.b4 ♗c7 43.c4



This is probably the kind of position Almasi was aiming for when he decided to decline his tactical opportunities earlier in the game. White's chances are very promising due to the weak pawns on a6 and d6.

43...♖cb8

Slightly better was: 43...g6 44.f6 (but not 44.fxg6?! fxg6 as Black gains some chances of counterplay along the f-file) 44...g5 45.h5 ♖e8 Followed by ...♖e6, similar to the game, but with some extra moves for Black.

44.♔c3 ♔b7 45.♖d1

Better was: 45.♗e3! (aimed at preventing Black's only active plan with ...g7-g6) 45...♖g8 46.h5! Now White has a free hand to operate on the queenside, which he can do successfully. For example 46...f6 (weak is 46...g6? 47.hxg6 fxg6 48.♗xh6 winning a pawn) 47.♖a1 ♖gd8 48.♖ad1 ♖ac8 when White can prepare a potential c4-c5 or b4-b5 break, which should be enough to win. Play could then proceed 49.♔b3 ♖b8 50.c5!? ♔c6 51.♔c4 when Black cannot take on c5: 51...dxc5? 52.♗xc5+– And White will trade rooks followed by ♗f8.

45...♖g8 46.♗e3?!

Too slow. Better was 46.h5!? as in the previous note.

46...g6!

A good decision. Instead 46...♔c6 47.♖da1 ♔b7 48.b5 lands Black in serious trouble.

47.f6

But not 47.♗xh6? due to 47...gxf5 48.gxf5 ♖g4 regaining the pawn with active play.

47...g5!

Preventing g4-g5. Now the f6-pawn will be a weakness, distracting White's forces from queenside operations.

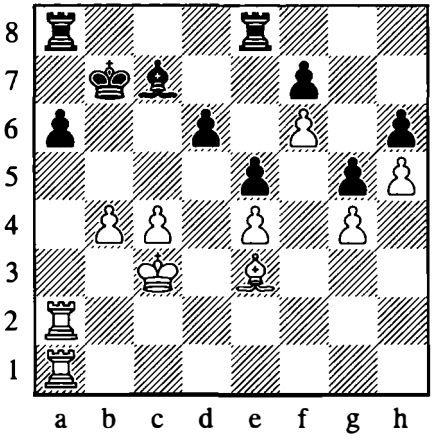
48.h5

Worse is 48.hxg5 hxg5 when Black will bring his pieces into the game via the h-file.

48...♖gc8

Somewhat better was 48...♖ge8 49.♖f1 ♖e6 when White is tied to the defence of the f6-pawn, and it is unclear how to play for a win anymore.

49.♖da1 ♖e8 50.♖4a2



50...♗b6?

A very unfortunate mistake, just when Black's accurate defence was beginning to give results.

Instead 50...♖e6 would have given decent chances to save the game. For example 51.b5 a5 52.b6 ♗d8 (of course not 52...♗xb6?? 53.♖b2 ♖a6 54.♖ab1+–) 53.♖xa5 ♖xa5 54.♖xa5 ♖xf6 55.♖a7† ♔c6 56.♔d3 ♖f3! threatening ...♗xb6 or ...♖xe3.

Even 50...a5!? gives good defensive chances: 51.bxa5 ♖a6 White is stuck, for example 52.♖b2† ♔c6 53.♖b5 ♖e6.

51.♗xb6 ♔xb6 52.♖a5!+–

Threatening the winning move b4-b5. Of course not 52.b5? a5.

52...♖a7

If 52...♖e6 53.b5 ♖xf6 54.♖xa6† ♖xa6 55.♖xa6† ♔b7 56.c5! ♖f3† 57.♔c4 and the entrance of the king decides the game: 57...dxc5 58.♖xh6+–

53.♖d1

Simpler was 53.b5! – the game reaches this position on move 55.

53...♔c7

The alternative 53...♖e6 does not help because of 54.♖xd6†! ♖xd6 55.c5† ♔c6 56.cxd6 ♔xd6 57.♔b3 when White **can** transition to a winning pawn endgame after: 57...♖a8 58.♔a3 (58.b5? ♖b8! 59.♖xa6† ♔c5) 58...♔c6 59.b5†!+–

54.♖da1

An alternative is 54.♖ad5 ♖e6 55.c5! which is winning, because of: 55...dxc5? (55...♖xf6 56.♖xd6) 56.♖d7† ♔b8 (56...♔b6 57.bxc5†) 57.♖d8† ♔b7 58.♖1d7† ♔b6 59.bxc5†

54...♔b6 55.b5 ♖ea8 56.♔b4

The game will turn into a winning pawn endgame for White.

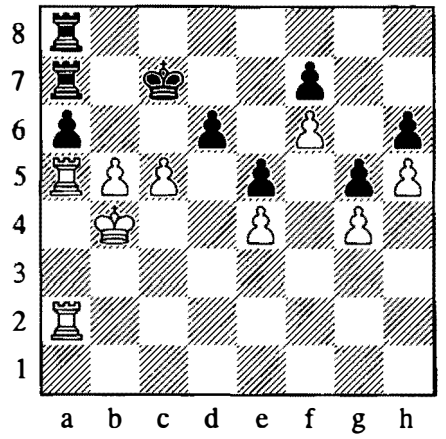
56...♔b7

56...axb5 57.♖xa7 ♖xa7 58.♖xa7 ♔xa7 59.cxb5 and wins.

57.♖1a2

Simpler was: 57.♖xa6! ♖xa6 58.♖xa6 ♖xa6 59.bxa6† ♔b6 (59...♔xa6 60.c5+–) 60.c5†! dxc5† 61.♔c4+–

57...♔c7 58.c5!



Black resigns, since after 58...dxc5† 59.♔xc5 ♔b7 60.♖xa6 the kingside pawns will be lost.
1–0

Final remarks

1. Having a pawn on f5 together with a firm control of the d5-square gives White superb attacking chances. The attack is enhanced by having a bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal.
2. White's play was strong, but careless through the first phase. He missed multiple near-winning options in order to transfer the game into a superior, but possibly defensible, endgame.
3. The endgame was practically very difficult for Black. In fact, Black executed all the correct ideas, but lost due to a simple miscalculation with 50...♗b6. Without this mistake, Black could have held the game for much longer, and possibly even drawn after a long and precise defence. Again, it is not easy to deal with a weak d5-square, and Black could have committed a decisive mistake later on.
4. Black faced problems due to the weak d5-square throughout the game. In order to improve upon his chances it would be necessary to correct the opening imprecisions, especially 14...e5 which converts the game into a Najdorf Type II structure where Black is not ready to fight for the d5-square.

Baadur Jobava – Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu

Burgas 2012

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's central reaction ...d6-d5 once the advance f4-f5 has been achieved.

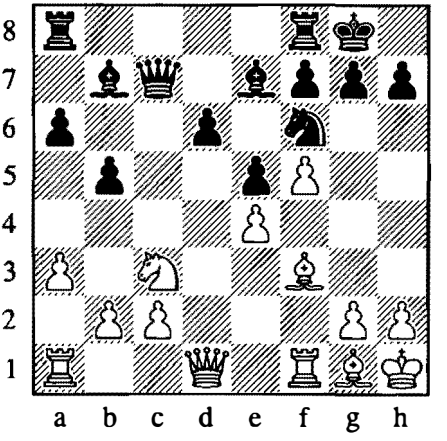
1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘ge2 e6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗e2 ♘f6 8.a3

Preventing 8...♗b4. The main line is 8.0–0 but probably White wanted to avoid 8...♗b4 in the style of a Taimanov Sicilian.

8...♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 10.f4 d6 11.♔h1 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 e5 13.♗g1

Also interesting is 13.♗e3!? b5.

13...b5 14.♗f3 ♗b7 15.f5



We reach the position of interest, and it is time for a comparison with the 14th move of the previous game:

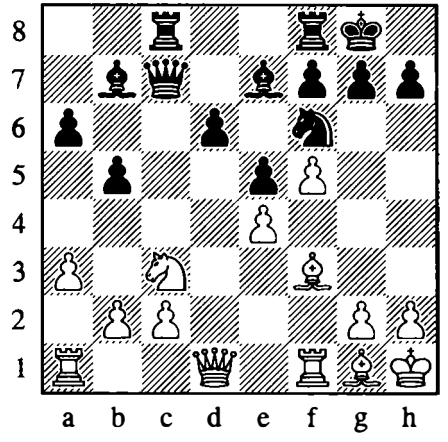
1. White's king is on the kingside. In the previous game the attack h2-h4 and g2-g4-g5 was strong and risk-free. Here, this attack is good too, but it could backfire against White's monarch.
2. Black's bishop on b7 is far more useful than a bishop on d7, as in the previous game; it pressures the e4-pawn and controls the d5-square.

3. White's bishop on f3 is less useful than in the previous game; remember this bishop made it to b3, creating great attacking prospects.
Overall, this position is approximately equal, with a slight tendency to favour Black, as the ...d6-d5 break is attainable.

15...♖ac8

A standard move, immobilizing the knight on c3 due to the pressure on c2.

An alternative was 15...♖fd8 preparing ...d6-d5. 16.♕d3 (Bad is 16.♕e1?! because of 16...d5! 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 ♖xd5∓ when Black has gained the initiative; 16.♘d5?! does not work well due to 16...♗xd5 17.exd5 e4! 18.♗e2 ♕b7 when White must find a way to compensate for the lost pawn.) 16...♖ac8 With a standard position.



16.♕e1

Safer was 16.♕d3 ♖fd8 17.♖fd1 when White momentarily prevents the ...d6-d5 break.

16...♖fe8

The reader should become familiar with this alternative way of preparing the ...d6-d5 break.

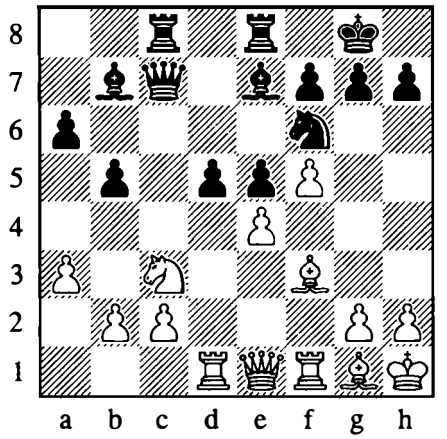
After the more standard 16...♖fd8 17.♖d1 White wants to proceed with g2-g4-g5, thus Black should react soon. For example after 17...d5!? 18.♘xd5 ♗xd5 19.exd5 ♗d6!∞ (or 19...♕xc2!?) Black's next move will probably be ...♖e8, so it would have made sense to place the rook on e8 immediately on move 16.

17.♖d1 d5!

In most Sicilian-type positions, plans for both sides work around this break, either preparing for it, or attempting to prevent it. As this break has been achieved, it is White who must try to equalize.

An alternative was 17...a5!? 18.♘xb5 ♕xc2 19.♘xd6 ♗xd6 20.♖xd6 ♗xe4 with level chances.

Instead 17...♗c6?! protecting b5 and preparing ...a6-a5 followed by ...b5-b4, seems too slow after 18.g4 h6 (slightly better is 18...♘d7 19.h4 a5 20.g5 but the break f5-f6 is coming) 19.h4 ♘d7 20.♗e3 when White's attack becomes dangerous, while Black's ...d6-d5 reaction now seems far from possible.

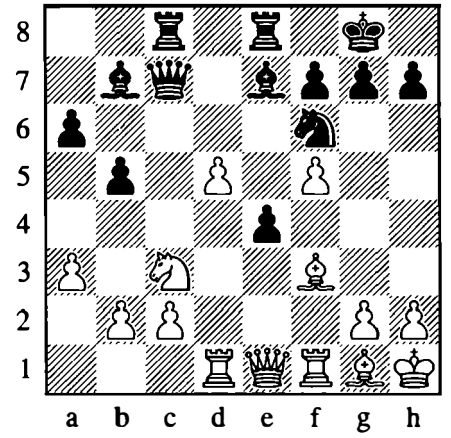


18.exd5

If 18.♘xd5 then 18...♗xd5 19.exd5 ♗c5! is the most precise: 20.♗xc5 ♕xc5 Black will regain the pawn under favourable conditions, for example: 21.♗e4 ♕c4 22.d6 (22.♗d3 ♕xd5∓) 22...♖cd8 23.♗d3 ♕c6∓

18...e4!

This is the key to the move 16...♖fe8. Suddenly Black's pieces become very active.



19.♘xe4?

A serious tactical inaccuracy.

Better was 19.♗e2 ♗c5 again, attempting to regain the d5-pawn favourably. (19...♗xa3!? is also worth considering) 20.♗xc5 ♕xc5 21.♕d2 ♖ed8 22.d6 ♖c6 (or 22...♖d7!? to double rooks and regain the d6-pawn, while keeping queens on the board) 23.♕d4 ♕xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖cxd6 25.♖xd6 ♖xd6 Black's position is a tiny amount better because of the passed e4-pawn.

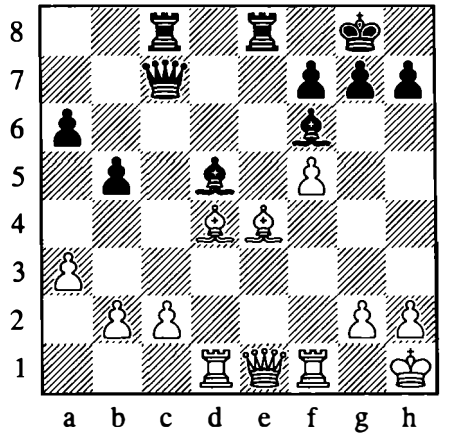
19...♗xd5 20.♗d4?

The decisive mistake in an already bad position.

If 20.♘xf6† ♗xf6 21.♕d2 (or 21.♖xd5 ♖xe1 22.♖xe1 ♗xb2∓) 21...♗xf3 22.♖xf3 ♗xb2∓ White is losing the c2-pawn without any counterplay.

20...♘xe4 21.♗xe4 ♗f6!→

Winning a piece and the game.



22.♗xf6 ♗xe4 23.♕h4

The alternative 23.♗c3 loses the queen after 23...♗xg2† 24.♔xg2 ♖xe1.

23...gxf6 24.♖f4 ♕xc2 25.♖g4† ♔f8

White resigns, as Black's king is in no real danger.

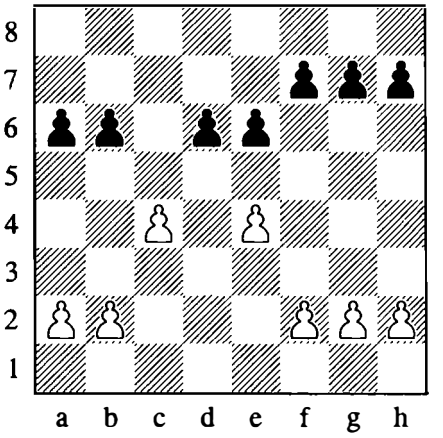
0–1

Final remarks

1. Black's pieces were ideally placed for the pawn structure, and this played a major role in the development of the game. In particular, the difference between Black's bishop on b7 and White's bishop on f3 made it easier for Black to conduct the game.
2. The idea of ...d6-d5 followed by ...e5-e4 is typical, but it is only strong after White has already played f3-f4-f5. The reader should remember this theme and remember when it works.

Chapter 10

The Hedgehog



The hedgehog structure is characterized by Black's pawns on a6-b6-d6-e6, covering some central squares and preventing White's forces from approaching, like a real hedgehog does!

Advancing several adjacent pawns to the 3rd rank would *generally* be a bad decision. For example, moving kingside pawns to h6-g6-f6-e6 would be a major positional mistake as it creates multiple weaknesses. Here this is not the case, as the natural arrangement of Black's pieces allows for the pawns to be defended rather easily, while keeping a variety of active plans at hand. White generally has a spatial advantage in the hedgehog, and Black's main plan is to break in the centre with ...d6-d5, or sometimes ...b6-b5. White will typically arrange his pieces to prevent such plans, while keeping the game tense and flexible. Now, let's discuss specific lines of action for each side.

White's plans

1. Break on the queenside with c4-c5.
2. Break on the queenside with b4-b5.
3. Break on the queenside with a4-a5.
4. Pressure the d6-pawn, but only after some pieces have been traded.

Black's plans

1. Break in the centre with ...d6-d5.
2. Break on the queenside with ...b6-b5.
3. Create a kingside attack with ...♔h8, ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5-g4. Or maybe with ...h7-h5-h4-h3.
4. Prepare all the plans above without actually executing any of them until the right opportunity comes.

White's Plans 1-3 are often based on arranging pieces actively to subsequently open up the queenside. Such action often gives White a big advantage because Black's pieces are not as active due to their limited space. The most common of these breaks is c4-c5, which typically opens the b- and c-files. White's fourth plan is not as easy to implement because the d6-pawn is not always vulnerable. Black will usually have a bishop on e7 (or c7) which easily protects this pawn from the attack of rooks down the d-file. In addition, the breaks ...b6-b5 and ...d6-d5 are powerful, drawing attention away from this small vulnerability. However, after some pieces are traded, Black's chances of counterplay lose strength, giving more importance to a vulnerable d6-pawn.

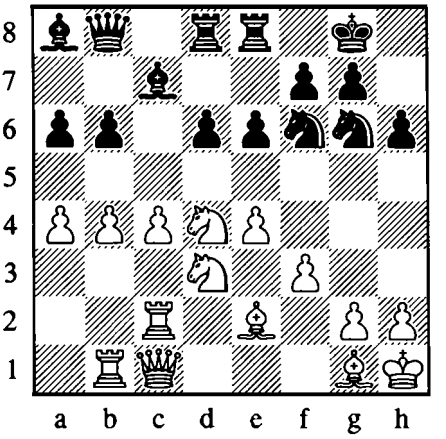
If White's bishop is on the f1-a6 diagonal, Black's first plan is the most important. This plan is so strong that White players will devote a great deal of energy to fight against it. In most cases White

will be able to prevent this break, and Black will need a new plan to create counterplay. A popular option is to create kingside threats with the third plan. This plan often yields double-edged positions where a single slip can be very costly for either side. As we will learn in this chapter, if White cannot fight this plan with a queenside reaction, then Black's kingside play will give him an excellent position.

If White's bishop is on g2, then the ...d6-d5 break is much more difficult to carry out, but then Black's plan second plan (the ...b6-b5 break) gains strength. As long as White does not have a bishop on the f1-a6 diagonal, this break is likely to work well. Something to notice is that if White has played g2-g3 and ♗g2, then Black's plan of ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5-g4 does not really hit anything, hence it should not be attempted at all.

Finally, something to mention about Black's position is its flexibility. Often White will find ways to prevent or undermine Black's attempts for counterplay. In such cases, Black can often just wait and attempt new plans without damaging his position. In many cases it is better for Black to continue preparing his plans, or to start a new plan, than to execute a plan under unfavourable circumstances; this is the essence of the fourth plan.

As the reader may have noticed from the discussion above, a key factor in the hedgehog is whether White's bishop is developed on g2 or stays on the f1-a6 diagonal. We will focus on the latter as I believe it resembles more closely the spirit of the hedgehog structure. The first four games in this chapter will illustrate White's four plans in numeric order. The fifth example will illustrate Black's ...d6-d5 break, while the remaining examples will illustrate what Black may do if this break is not possible. Games 6 and 7 are examples of the ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5-g4 plan; the eighth game is an example of the ...b6-b5 break, while the last game is a fragment illustrating Black's fourth plan – the ability to wait for an opportunity without damaging his position.



The position in this diagram is from the game **Kasparov – Kramnik**, Botvinnik Memorial 2001. We use this diagram as a starting point to discuss the key strategic elements in this position, from White's perspective:

Piece arrangement

1. White's rooks should be placed on the b- and c-files, ready for any queenside break.
2. The queen should be placed on c1 protecting the rook on b1 from the potential X-ray attack by the queen on b8.
3. The bishop on g1 is needed against the battery ...♕b8 and ...♗c7, attacking h2.
4. The knights on d4 and d3 (or a4) ideally support White's centre.

Possible breaks

1. White can attempt to break on the queenside with a4-a5, b4-b5 or c4-c5. Any of these would prove effective given White's ideal piece arrangement.
2. Black does not have effective central breaks. The break ...b6-b5 obviously loses a pawn, while the break ...d6-d5 is immediately punished by the typical exd5, followed by c4-c5 with a strong positional advantage. This response should be remembered, and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Roeland Pruijssers – Gyula Izsak

Germany 2012

Learning objective: This game illustrates the strength in White's c4-c5 break and the subsequent queenside attack.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♕c7 7.a3 b6 8.♗e3 ♗b7 9.f3 d6 10.♗e2 ♗e7 11.♖c1 0–0 12.0–0 ♘bd7 13.b4 ♖ac8 14.♔h1 ♖fe8 15.♕d2 ♕b8 16.♖fd1

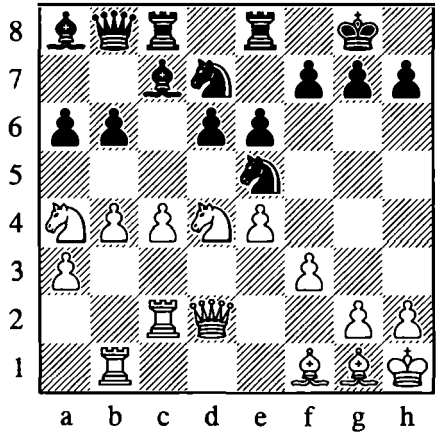
So far both sides are following the typical moves of a hedgehog position. Black's forces are arranged to prepare ...d6-d5, while White is ready to prevent it with his rooks on the c- and d-files.

16...♘e5 17.♘a4 ♗a8

Protecting b6.

18.♗f1 ♘fd7 19.♖c2 ♗d8 20.♗g1 ♗c7 21.♖b1

As the reader may notice, the piece arrangement resembles very closely the previous example.



21...♗b7?

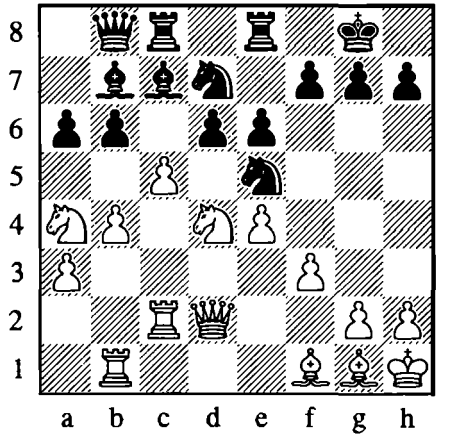
The c4-c5 break would be imminent after the preparatory move ♕c1, but this makes things much easier for White.

The break 21...d5? hangs the a6-pawn for no compensation after: 22.cxd5 exd5 23.♗xa6 ♖cd8 24.♕c3! ♕a7 25.♗b5+–

Instead, Black could have tried 21...♔h8!? followed by ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5; 22.♕c1! Defending the rook on b1 and preparing c4-c5 (White is not ready to break with 22.c5? bxc5 23.♗xa6 [23.bxc5?? ♕xb1–+] 23...cxd4 24.♗xc8 ♖xc8 25.♕xd4 when chances are roughly equal). 22...♗d8 23.c5! b5 24.♘b2 d5 (24...dxc5 25.bxc5 ♘c6 26.♘xc6 ♗xc6 27.♘c4!± followed by a3-a4 pressuring the b5-pawn) 25.exd5 ♗xd5 26.a4± White's position is preferable because of the vulnerable a6- and b5-pawns.

22.c5!

White achieves the thematic c4-c5 break under excellent conditions. Notice how powerful the bishops on f1 and g1 become.



22...b5

Hoping to keep the game closed.

Preventing c5-c6 with 22...♕a8 is met by: 23.cxb6 ♗xb6 24.♘xb6 ♘xb6 25.♘xe6! ♖xe6 26.♗xb6±

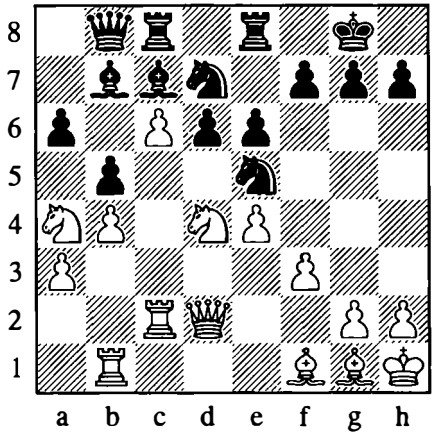
Also, opening up the position with 22...dxc5 23.bxc5 bxc5 (23...b5? 24.c6!+–) 24.♘xe6! ♖xe6 25.♖cb2 ♖d6 26.♕e3 ♕a8 27.♖xb7± gives White a big advantage due to the weak a6- and c5-pawns.

23.c6!

This typical intermediate move must be

remembered, as it creates permanent weaknesses in Black's camp.

Instead 23.♘b2?! gives away part of the advantage after 23...♘c6! 24.a4 ♘xd4 25.♗xd4 dxc5 26.bxc5 ♗xh2 27.axb5 axb5 28.♗xb5± when White is slightly better but the position is complicated.



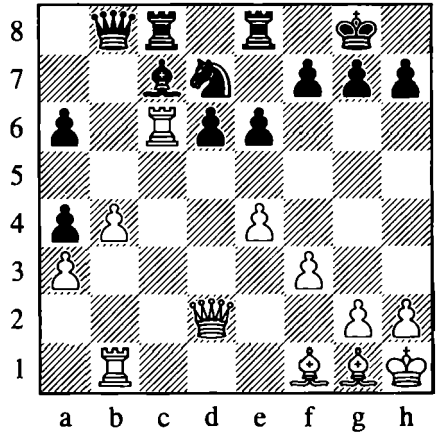
23...bxa4 24.cxd7

Even stronger is 24.b5!! which is analyzed separately after this game.

24...♘xd7 25.♘c6 ♗xc6

But not: 25...♕a8? 26.♘a7!+–

26.♖xc6±



This is one of White's dream positions in the hedgehog. The a6- and a4-pawns are nearly lost while Black cannot easily organize any counterplay.

26...♕b7?!

Aiming to trap the rook for two pieces, but this does not help.

More stubborn was 26...♗b6 27.♕xd6 ♗xg1 28.♔xg1 ♕a7† 29.♔h1 ♘b8! protecting the a6-pawn, though after 30.♖xc8 ♖xc8 31.♖c1!± White still has a big advantage.

27.♖bc1 ♘c5 28.♖xc7 ♖xc7 29.bxc5 dxc5 30.♗c4+–

30.♕a5!? is strong too.

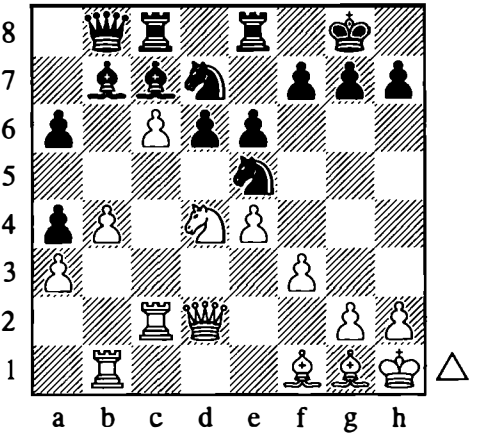
A rook and two weak pawns are no opponent for White's strong bishops, and Black resigned on move 57.

...1–0

Final remarks

1. After the break 22.c5! essentially every tactical variation favours White due to his ideal piece arrangement.
2. It is worth noticing how well White's bishops work from g1 and f1.

The potential strength of White's forces



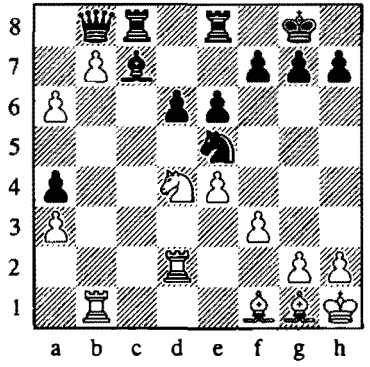
The previous example was a very convincing win for White, but on White's 24th move a wonderful thematic blow was missed. The strongest continuation was:

24.b5!!

Opening lines and unleashing the full potential of White's forces. Black is desperate as the following variations illustrate.

24...♗a8

Or 24...♘c5 25.bxa6 ♘b3 hoping to block the b-file, but White is ready to sacrifice his queen with: 26.cxb7! ♘xd2 27.♖xd2+–



Now the a6- and b7-pawns together with the bishops on f1 and g1 are far stronger than a queen.

25.cxd7 ♘xd7

Material is balanced, but White's coordination is so strong that the game is decided on the spot after:

26.♘c6! ♕b7

26...♗xc6 is refuted by: 27.bxc6! ♕xb1 28.cxd7 ♕xf1 29.♖xc7!+–

27.♕c1!

Threatening bxa6 trapping the queen.

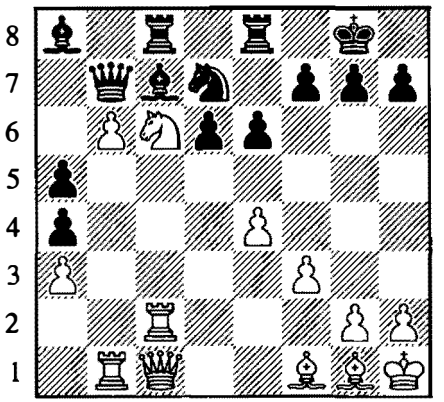
27...a5

27...axb5 loses to 28.♘a7! h6 29.♘xc8 ♖xc8 30.♖xb5 ♘b6 31.♗xb6.

27...♗d8 offers no relief after: 28.♘xd8 ♖exd8 29.bxa6 ♖xc2 30.axb7 ♖xc1 31.bxa8=♕ ♖xa8 32.♖xc1+–

28.b6!

Forcing the opening of lines and making the most of White's ideally placed rooks and bishops.



28...♗d8

28...♗xb6 is bad because of: 29.♘e7†!+–

Also 28...♘xb6 loses after: 29.♘xa5 ♕b8 (or 29...♕a7 30.♗xb6+–) 30.♗a6+–

29.♘xa5

White is easily winning, and the game could finish after:

29...♖xc2 30.♕xc2 ♕b8 31.♕xa4 ♘f6 32.b7 ♗xa5 33.♕xa5 ♗xb7 34.♗a6

Winning the bishop, since White is mating after:

34...♖e7 35.♗xb7 ♖xb7 36.♖xb7 ♕xb7 37.♕d8†

From the analysis of this position we learn about the destructive power of White's forces after the queenside has been opened. It is essential to observe how, after this break, White's rooks on b1 and c2, and bishops on f1 and g1, perform to the very best of their capacity.

Mauricio Flores Rios – Hovik Hayrapetian

Sant Marti 2013

Learning objective: The b4-b5 break is often underestimated by many strong players due to its anti-positional appearance. This game serves as an example to prove that the benefits of this break often outweigh its disadvantages.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♕c7 7.a3 b6 8.♗e3 ♗b7 9.f3 ♗e7

Black delays pushing ...d7-d6 in order to keep open the possibility of ...♗d6 attacking the h2-pawn.

The try 9...♗d6? threatening the h2-pawn and provoking the anti-positional g2-g3, runs into the thematic refutation 10.♘db5! axb5 11.♘xb5 when White regains the piece with a crushing attack. For example: 11...♗g3† (or 11...♕c6 12.♕xd6 ♘a6 13.♖d1+– followed by ♗xb6) 12.hxg3 ♕xg3† 13.♗f2 ♕f4 14.♕d6!+–

10.♖c1 0–0 11.♗e2 d6

Once again 11...♗d6? runs into 12.♘db5! axb5 13.♘xb5 ♗g3† 14.hxg3 ♕xg3† 15.♔f1 when Black is lost due to the threats of ♗xb6 and ♖h3. For example, 15...♖a6 16.♖h3 ♕e5 17.♕d2 followed by ♗f4 or ♗d4 trapping the queen.

There is no benefit in delaying castling with 11...♖d8 as after: 12.0–0 ♗d6?! 13.♔h1! (but not 13.♘db5? axb5 14.♘xb5 ♗xh2† 15.♔h1 ♕g3–+) The h2-pawn is immune. For example: 13...♗xh2? 14.f4 Now Black's bishop will be trapped: 14...♗g3 15.e5 ♘e4 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♗f3 ♕b7 18.♕c2! ♗xf3 19.♖xf3 ♗h4 20.♖h3+–

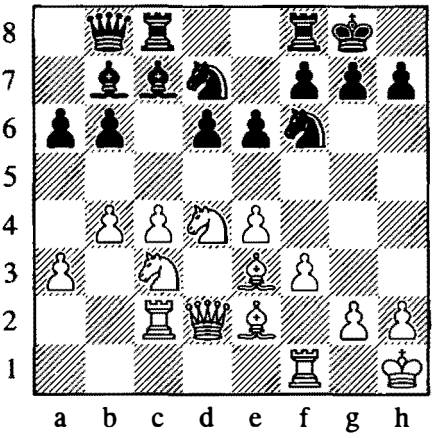
12.0–0 ♘bd7 13.b4 ♖ac8 14.♔h1 ♕b8

If 14...♘e5 15.♕d2 the c4-pawn is untouchable since after 15...♘xc4?? 16.♗xc4 ♕xc4 17.♘a4! the queen is trapped.

15.♕d2 ♗d8 16.♖c2

Once again White follows the piece arrangement of the previous two examples.

16...♗c7



17.♗g1

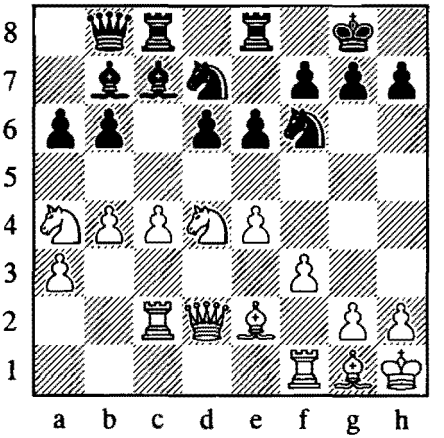
Protecting h2.

The alternative 17.b5!? is analyzed separately after this game.

17...♖fe8

The premature 17...d5? loses material due to the weakness of the a6-pawn, say after: 18.cxd5 ♗f4 19.♕d1 exd5 20.♘xd5 ♘xd5 21.exd5 ♖xc2 22.♕xc2 ♗xd5 (or 22...♘f6 23.♘c6!±) 23.♗xa6±

18.♘a4



18...♘e5

We should also check:

18...d5?!

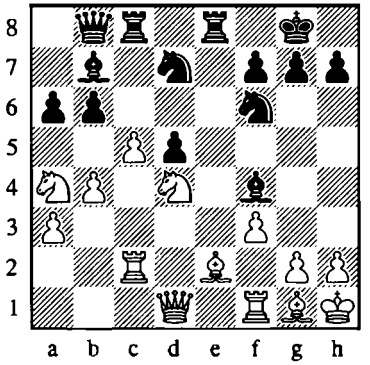
But this break is still premature:

19.exd5 ♗f4

Or 19...exd5 20.c5! b5 21.c6! bxa4 22.cxb7 ♕xb7 23.♖fc1± with a positional edge due to the weakened queenside and White's excellent piece coordination.

20.♕d1 exd5 21.c5!

This thematic break must be remembered.



21...b5

Or 21...bxc5 22.bxc5± when White's passed c5-pawn and his knight on d4 reduce Black's chances of counterplay.

22.♘b2

Or the typical: 22.c6!? bxa4 23.cxb7 ♕xb7 24.♖xc8 ♕xc8 25.♕xa4±

22...♘e5

22...♘f8 23.a4±

Typically ...♘e5-c4 gives counterplay, but here the f4-bishop is misplaced after:

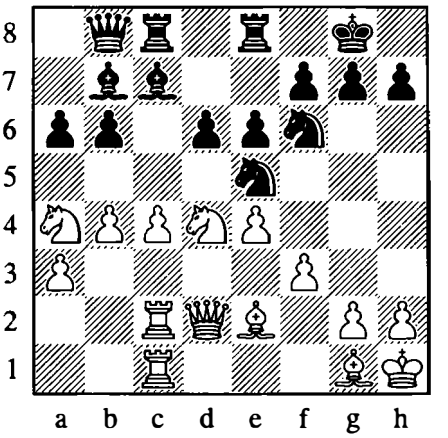
23.g3! ♗h6 24.♘f5±

Followed by ♘xh6 ruining Black's queenside.

19.♖fc1!?

I wanted to double rooks on the c-file reinforcing the c4-c5 break, especially since Black has lost protection of the c5-square by playing ...♘d7-e5.

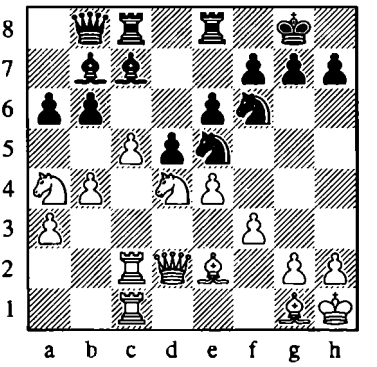
More usual is 19.♖b1 but I was somewhat afraid of 19...♘xe4 20.fxe4 ♗xe4, though White is just better after: 21.♖f1 ♗xc2 22.♕xc2±



19...♘c6?

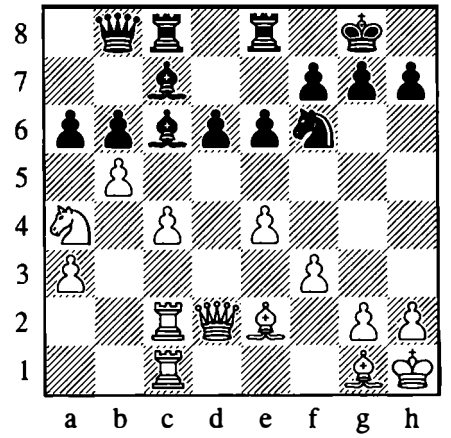
The break 19...d5!? is tempting, since the standard reply 20.exd5? exd5 21.c5 (or 21.cxd5 ♘xd5=) does not work well after 21...♘c4!. This is the key. 22.♗xc4 ♗f4! 23.♕d1 bxc5 24.bxc5 ♗xc1 25.♕xc1 dxc4 With a complex position.

However 19...d5 can be met by the strong 20.c5!:



This creates a dangerous passed pawn, and after 20...b5 (20...dxe4?! is not as strong as it seems after 21.cxb6 ♗d6 [or 21...exf3 22.♗xf3±] 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♖xc8† ♗xc8 24.fxe4 ♘xe4 25.♕c2± when White's b6-pawn is a dangerous weapon) 21.c6! bxa4 22.cxb7 ♕xb7 23.b5!± White has a strong queenside initiative.

20.♘xc6 ♗xc6 21.b5!±



I was already writing this chapter when this game took place, and I was happy to find an example of this powerful break in my own practice. Many players unconsciously disregard it in their calculations, as it has a rather anti-positional appearance. Nevertheless, this is a perfect opportunity to execute this break as the b6- and d6-pawns will become vulnerable rather quickly. Black will have to give up material:

21...♗a8

The only reasonable defence.

Opening the c-file with 21...axb5 22.cxb5 only helps White after: 22...♗a8 (22...♗d7 23.♕d4+– or 22...♗b7 23.♘xb6 ♗xb6 24.♗xb6 ♖xc2 25.♖xc2 ♗xe4 26.♗c7!+–) 23.♘xb6! Winning a decisive pawn.

After 21...♗d7 22.♕d4 the b6-pawn is lost.

Also 21...♗b7 22.bxa6 ♗xa6 runs into the nice 23.c5! winning material: 23...b5 (or 23...♗xe2 24.cxb6+–) 24.cxd6 (or 24.c6!?+–) 24...♗xd6 25.♘c5 ♗f4 26.♗e3 ♗xe3 27.♕xe3 ♕b6 28.♕b3! Winning the b5-pawn and the game.

22.bxa6

White is threatening ♖b1 followed by ♘xb6.

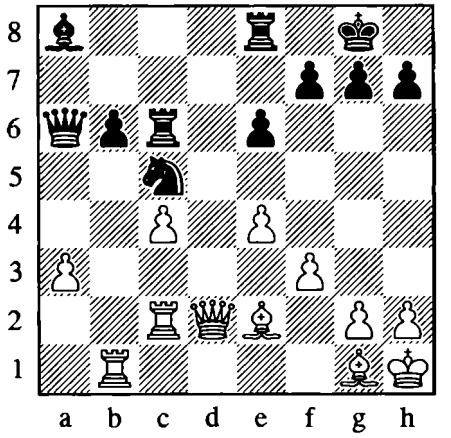
22...♘d7 23.♖b1 ♕a7 24.♘c3

If 24.♖cb2 ♕xa6 25.♘xb6?! (25.♘c3!? is similar to the game) 25...♘xb6 26.♗xb6 ♗xb6 27.♖xb6 ♕xa3 28.♖xd6± the lack of dark-squared bishops makes it harder for White to utilize his advantage.

24...♘c5 25.♘b5 ♕xa6 26.♘xc7

Even stronger was 26.♖cb2! ♕b7 (or 26...♗b8 27.♘xd6 ♖ed8 28.♖xb6 ♕xa3 29.♘xc8! ♖xd2 30.♖xb8 h5 31.♘b6† ♔h7 32.♖xa8+–) 27.♘xd6 ♗xd6 28.♕xd6 when the b6-pawn is soon lost.

26...♖xc7 27.♕xd6 ♖c6 28.♕d2±



White has an extra pawn for no compensation. The game remains interesting since the b6-pawn is often sufficient to stop White's a- and c-pawns; this is a technical difficulty to overcome. Notice how the presence of White's dark-squared bishop plays a key role in converting the advantage.

28...f5

But not 28...♕xa3? 29.♖a2 when the queen is trapped.

29.e5

Keeping lines closed.

29...♕a7 30.♖d1!

Gaining control of the d-file.

30...♕c7

The a3-pawn is immune: 30...♕xa3? allows

31.♖a2 ♕b3 32.♖da1! attacking the a8-bishop: 32...♗b7 33.♖b2 and the queen is trapped.

31.♕d4

A more precise winning method was 31.♕c3!? ♖d8 32.♖cd2 ♖xd2 33.♕xd2 controlling the d-file and hoping to progress with a4-a5.

31...♗b7 32.♖cd2! ♗c8

32...♘b3? does not work due to: 33.♕d7! ♕xd7 (33...♘xd2?? 34.♕xe8#) 34.♖xd7+–

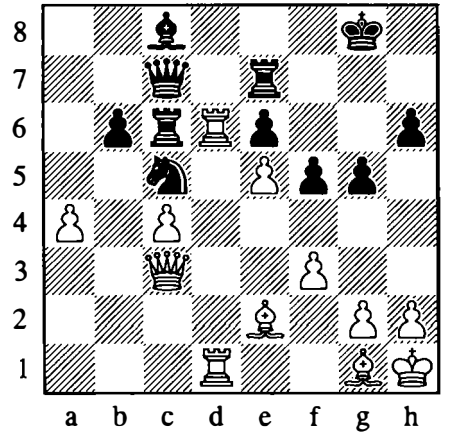
33.♕h4 h6

The e5-pawn is untouchable: 33...♕xe5? 34.♖d8 ♖xd8 35.♖xd8† ♔f7 36.♗d4! The key move. 36...♕xe2 37.♕h5† ♔e7 38.♕g5† ♔f7 39.♕xg7#

34.♕f4 g5 35.♕e3 ♘b7 36.♕c3

I finally came to realize that advancing my queenside pawns would be the only way to make progress.

36...♖e7 37.a4 ♘c5 38.♖d6!



38...♘xa4

38...♖d7 does not help because of: 39.♕b4 ♖cxd6 40.♖xd6 ♖xd6 41.exd6 ♕xd6 42.a5!+–

39.♕b4 ♘c5 40.♖xc6 ♕xc6 41.♖d6 ♕c7 42.♖xb6+–

White has finally achieved the trade of queenside pawns, obtaining a decisive passed pawn on c4.

42...♘b7 43.c5 ♕xe5 44.♗a6 ♖d7

Black is also lost after 44...♕c7 45.c6 ♘d6 46.♗c5 ♗xa6 47.♖xa6.

45.♗xb7!?

Simpler was: 45.c6! ♖d1 46.cxb7 ♕e3 47.bxc8=♕† ♔h7 48.♕e7† ♔g6 49.♕ce8#

45...♖d1 46.♖d6 ♖a1 47.♕d4 ♖xg1†

The last trick.

White wins a piece after: 47...♕xd4 48.♖xd4 ♗xb7 49.♖d8† ♔h7 50.♖d7† ♔g6 51.♖xb7+–

48.♕xg1

Certainly not 48.♔xg1?? ♕e1#.

Black resigned in view of 48...♗b7 49.♖d8 ♔g7 50.♖d7 winning the bishop on b7.

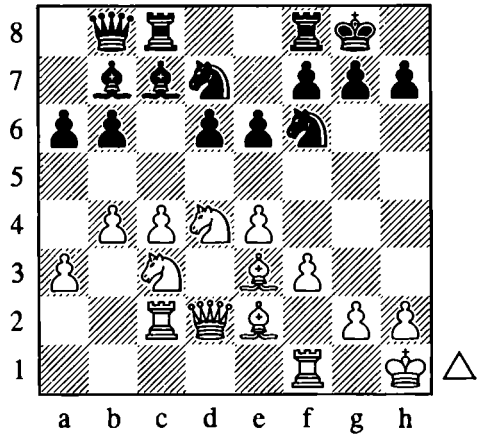
1–0

Final remarks

1. The b4-b5 break should not be disregarded despite its anti-positional look. It is true that White gives up control of the c5-square and weakens his a3- and c4-pawns, but these factors did not make much of a difference in this game. On the other hand, the sudden weakness of the b6- and d6-pawns forced Black to give up a pawn.
2. After White had an extra pawn, it was still a little difficult to impose his superiority, as the a3- and c4-pawns were disconnected. Nevertheless, the plan a3-a4-a5 should work well in most cases, especially if White has a dark-squared bishop applying pressure down the g1-a7 diagonal.
3. The variation 18...d5, in which White replies with the thematic 19.exd5 followed by 20.c5, should be carefully examined. This idea presents itself many times in hedgehog positions, and deserves a close study.

Another Example of the b4-b5 break

Although I managed to win the previous game by executing the b4-b5 break, I did not even consider it until *conditions were far too favourable to ignore it*. However, this break already deserves consideration in this position.



Let's examine how the game could have continued after:

17.b5!? ♗d8

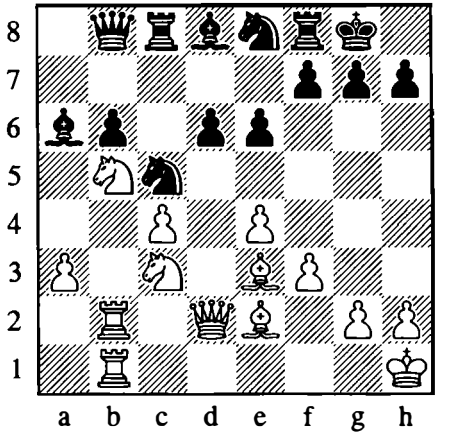
The best defence, covering the c6-square.

Occupying the weakened c5-square with 17...♘c5? actually worsens Black's position after 18.bxa6 ♘xa6 (but not 18...♗xa6? 19.♘c6 ♕b7 20.♘e7†+–) 19.♘db5 when the d6-pawn is far too vulnerable. A possible continuation is: 19...♗c6 (but not 19...♖fd8? 20.♘xc7 ♕xc7 21.♘b5 and the b6-pawn is lost) 20.♗g5! ♘c5 (20...♘d7? 21.♗e7+–) 21.♖d1 ♖cd8 22.♗xf6 gxf6 23.♕h6 Winning the f6-pawn and the game.

Closing the position with 17...a5 does not help due to: 18.♘c6! This forces the opening of lines, and after 18...♗xc6 19.bxc6 ♘e5 20.♘b5 ♘xc6 21.♖b2 ♘d7 22.♘xc7 ♕xc7 23.♖d1± White regains the pawn, while the b6-pawn is clearly weaker than White's c4-pawn.

The option 17...♕a8 18.bxa6 ♗xa6 19.♘db5± is similar to the main line.

18.bxa6 ♗xa6 19.♘db5 ♘e8 20.♖b1± ♘c5 21.♖cb2±



This type of position is a typical result of the b4-b5 break. Black has a knight on c5, but cannot make much use of it. Meanwhile, White pressures the d6-pawn and has a free hand to attempt further threats. Black's position is seemingly solid but passive. A possible continuation is:

21...♗f6 22.♖b4 h6 23.♘d4 ♘d7 24.♘a4 ♗d8 25.♘c2

Black is under severe pressure, and is bound to commit a mistake sooner or later.

25...♖c6?!

A subtle imprecision.

Probably better was 25...♕a8 keeping an inferior but solid position, since the immediate 26.♘xb6 ♘xb6 27.♗xb6 ♗xb6 28.♖xb6 ♗xc4 does not offer much to White.

26.e5!

Transforming the pawn structure, and allowing White to convert his advantage into a more concrete form.

26...♘xe5

Other moves do not help. A waiting move, such as 26...♔h8, is met by 27.f4!± followed by ♗f3, when both the b6- and d6-pawns are likely to fall.

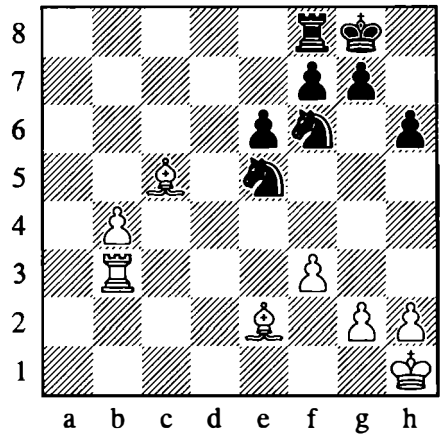
27.♘xb6 ♗xb6 28.♖xb6 ♕c8 29.♖xc6 ♕xc6 30.♘b4 ♕a8 31.♘xa6 ♕xa6 32.♖b3!

The most precise, protecting the a3-pawn while preparing c4-c5.

32...♘f6

32...♘xc4? loses to 33.♖c3! d5 (or 33...♘xd2 34.♗xa6 ♘b1 35.♖b3+–) 34.♗xc4 dxc4 35.♗c5.

33.c5 ♕a4 34.♕b4 ♕xb4 35.axb4 dxc5 36.♗xc5±



White has excellent winning chances due to his pair of bishops in an open position and his remote passed pawn.

Borki Predojevic – Dejan Nestorovic

Sarajevo 2013

Learning objective: This game illustrates White's queenside break a4-a5 and the subsequent pressure on Black's a6- and d6-pawns.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♕c7 7.♗e2

Note how White does not bother to prevent ...♗b4 with a2-a3. His idea will be to later push a2-a4 directly, with the idea of achieving the break a4-a5.

7...b6

Another option was 7...♗b4!? and a possible continuation is 8.0–0 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♘xe4 10.♗f3 ♘c5 11.♘b3 where White is slightly better, since 11...♘xb3? as in the game Bologan – Paragua, Tripoli 2004, could be met by 12.axb3! with a decisive positional advantage, for example: 12...0–0 13.♗a3 ♖e8 14.♗d6+–

8.♗e3 ♗b7 9.f3 d6?!

An imprecise move order, allowing White to quickly develop a queenside initiative.

Better was: 9...♗e7! 10.0–0 (now 10.a4?! is not as good since Black controls the b4-square: 10...♘c6 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.0–0 0–0=) 10...0–0 11.♖c1 d6 White's plan of a2-a4-a5 is now delayed since the rook is no longer on a1.

10.a4!

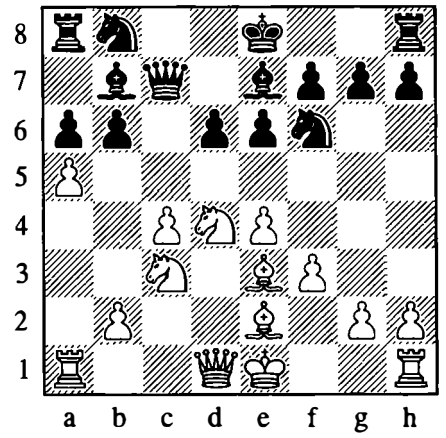
The beginning of White's plan.

10...♗e7

Preventing a4-a5 with 10...a5? is generally a bad idea since the weakening of the b5-square is far more serious. In this case, after 11.♘db5 ♕c6 12.♕d4 ♘bd7 13.♖d1 the d6-pawn is lost.

11.a5

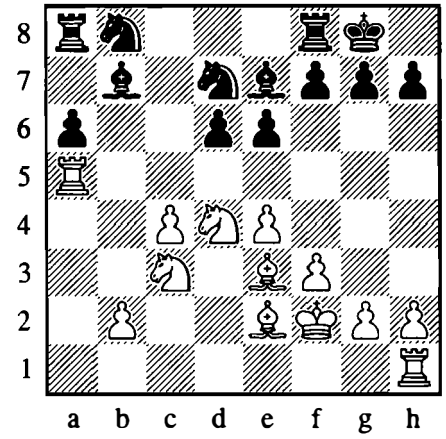
Achieving the a4-a5 break at an early stage, thanks to Black's imprecise opening.



11...bxa5

If 11...♘bd7 12.♘b3 0–0 13.axb6 ♘xb6 14.♘a5 ♖ab8 15.0–0 ♗a8 16.♗d4± White has a pleasant version of the hedgehog, as he can choose between pressuring the a6-pawn or creating a passed pawn with b2-b4-b5.

12.♕a4† ♘fd7 13.♕xa5 ♕xa5 14.♖xa5 0–0 15.♔f2±



By playing a2-a4-a5, White virtually prevents Black from carrying out his typical plans. Now that the queens are off the board, this is even more the case. So Black must defend passively and hope for a draw.

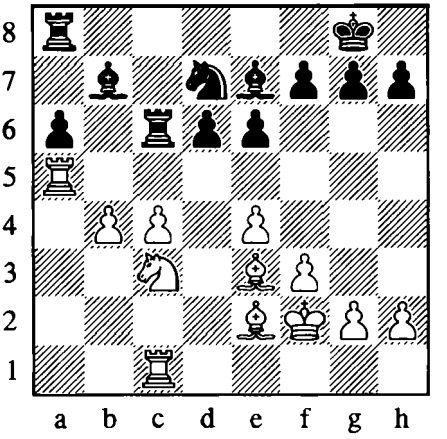
15...♖c8 16.♖c1

Instead 16.♖d1!? deserves attention, because after b2-b4, the threats b4-b5 and c4-c5 are much stronger if White's rooks are doubled on the d-file. For example, 16...♘e5 17.b3 ♘bd7 when Black manages to hold by temporarily preventing b3-b4.

16...♘c6?!

Making White's plans easier. Better was 16...♘e5! 17.b3 ♘bc6 18.♘xc6 ♘xc6 19.♖a2± though White is still better.

17.♘xc6 ♖xc6 18.b4



Black's position is unpleasant. He cannot create counterplay, but must be ready to meet potential c4-c5 and b4-b5 breaks.

18...♗h4†?!

The beginning of an incorrect plan. The bishop was best placed on e7.

It was better to play 18...♘e5! forcing White to clarify his intentions on the queenside. For example: 19.b5 ♖cc8 20.♖a4 ♔f8 21.♖ca1 axb5 22.♖xa8 ♖xa8 23.♖xa8† ♗xa8 24.cxb5± White has a small advantage due to his remote passed pawn.

19.g3 ♗d8?!

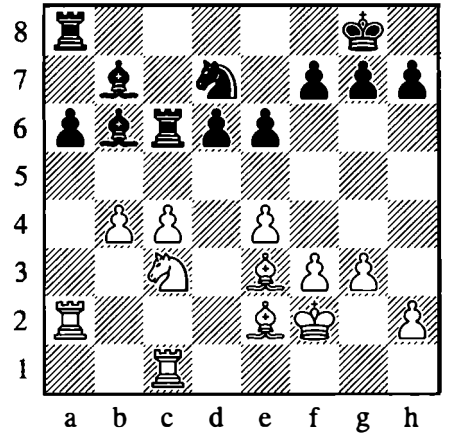
A useless move, as White should bring the rook back to a2 anyway, in order to double rooks on the d-file.

Even after a better move, Black is still struggling. For example: 19...♗f6 20.♖a2 ♖b8 21.♖d2 ♘e5 22.♘a4!± It is important for White to stay flexible, and to continue preparing either b4-b5 or c4-c5 as convenient.

20.♖a2 ♗b6

Bringing the king into play with 20...♔f8 does not help as after 21.♖d2 ♔e7 22.♖cd1! Black's position is suddenly lost due to the threats c4-c5 and b4-b5. For example: 22...♗c7 23.♘a4 f6 24.c5 ♗c8 25.b5!+–

Better was 20...♗e7! though after 21.♖d1± White has a significant advantage as Black wasted too many moves to realize that the bishop belonged on e7.



21.♘a4?

Conceptually appropriate, but missing a major opportunity.

Much better was 21.♖d1! as Black cannot prevent material loss. 21...♗xe3† (or 21...♔f8 22.c5 ♗c7 23.♘a4 ♔e7 24.♖ad2 ♖d8 25.b5 trapping Black's rook) 22.♔xe3 ♔f8 23.c5 ♔e7 24.♖ad2 a5 25.♖xd6 ♖xd6 26.cxd6† ♔d8 27.♖b1 axb4 28.♖xb4± With a healthy extra pawn.

21...♗xe3† 22.♔xe3 ♔f8±

Black's task is now much easier, but still he cannot hope for more than a draw.

23.c5!?

If 23.♖d1 ♔e7 24.♖ad2 ♘b6 25.♘b2 ♖ac8 26.f4± White is better, but improving his position is not straightforward.

23...dxc5 24.♖ac2

Also sensible was: 24.♘xc5 ♘xc5 25.bxc5 ♖ac8 26.♖a5±

24...♖ac8 25.b5!?

An interesting alternative. Instead of having a passed pawn on the c-file, White wants to have a dangerous passed pawn on the a-file, further away from Black's king.

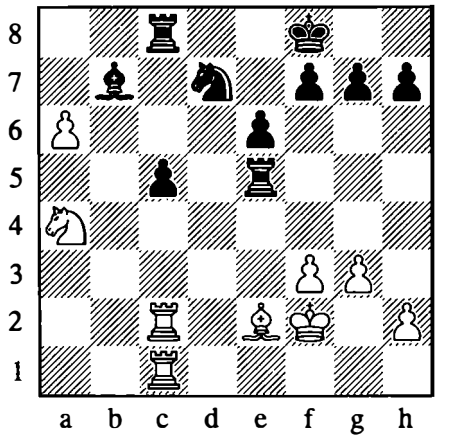
25...♖d6

The only move. Instead 25...axb5? loses an exchange: 26.♗xb5 ♖6c7 27.♗xd7 ♖xd7 28.♘b6+–

26.e5! ♖d5

Again the only defence. But not 26...♘xe5? 27.♘xc5 ♖b8 28.f4 ♘g6 29.♘xb7 ♖xb7 30.bxa6 when the a-pawn decides the game.

27.bxa6 ♖xe5† 28.♔f2



28...♗c6?

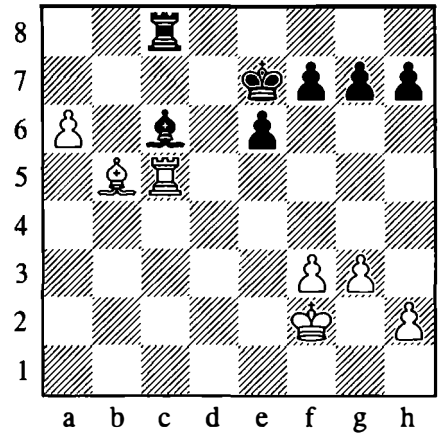
Better was: 28...♖xe2†! 29.♔xe2 ♗xa6† 30.♔f2 c4 31.♘b2 ♘b6± It is unclear how White can make progress.

29.♘xc5

Black's position is now lost after the forced sequence:

29...♖xc5 30.♖xc5 ♘xc5 31.♖xc5 ♔e7 32.♗b5!

This is the key.



32...♗xb5

A very nice pawn endgame results after:

32...♔d6 33.♖xc6† ♖xc6 34.♗xc6 ♔xc6

And Black eventually loses after:

35.♔e3 ♔b6 36.♔d4 ♔xa6 37.♔c5 ♔b7 38.♔d6 g5!

The game is far from over yet.

39.h4!

The careless variation 39.♔e7 ♔c6 40.♔xf7 e5 41.♔f6 loses after 41...g4!.

39...♔c8 40.hxg5 ♔d8 41.♔e5 ♔e7 42.g4 ♔e8 43.♔f6 ♔f8 44.f4 ♔g8 45.♔e7 ♔g7

And now White must triangulate with:

46.♔e8 ♔g8 47.♔d8 ♔g7 48.♔e7!

And only now is White winning after:

48...♔g8 49.♔f6 ♔f8 50.f5 exf5 51.gxf5 ♔g8 52.♔e7 ♔g7 53.f6† ♔g6 54.♔f8 ♔xg5 55.♔xf7+–

It is unlikely that Predojevic analyzed this variation, but he could probably foresee he was winning, and would be able to figure out the details as they arose.

33.♖xc8 ♗xa6 34.♖c7†

The rest of this game is irrelevant to our purposes, though **White won** the game convincingly.

Final remarks

1. White's early a2-a4-a5 break was very powerful, and Black should revise his poor opening sequence to avoid such an inferior position.
2. After White achieved the a4-a5 break, Black's main problem was his lack of counterplay and the vulnerability of the a6- and d6-pawns.
3. White missed a major chance to win by not attacking the d6-pawn directly on move 21. The tactics were favourable and the game could have been decided quickly.

The space disadvantage – and the trading of pieces

Based on the previous examples, it should be clear that White's spatial advantage plays a significant role in hedgehog positions. Most strategy books teach that we should trade pieces when we have less space. Does this mean Black should trade pieces in the hedgehog? The natural reply would be "Yes" but reality is not as simple, and in many cases the answer is a forthright "No". The reason is that Black's chances of counterplay are mostly based on a ...d6-d5 break, which is unlikely to be helpful unless Black can create serious tactical threats. The trading of two, or even one minor piece, severely undermines the potential threat of a ...d6-d5 break. In other words, having traded some minor pieces would give White a more stable centre, hence a lasting positional advantage.

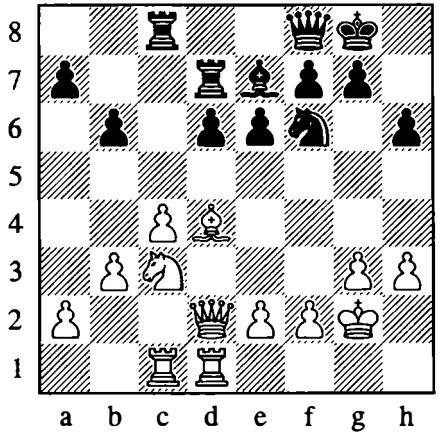
Pavel Eljanov – Dmitri Jakovenko

FIDE World Cup, Tromsø 2013

Learning objectives:

1. The position after the diagram is an example of White's advantage in the hedgehog once a couple of minor pieces have been traded.
2. The reader should pay close attention to how Black is unable to push ...d6-d5, and hence must remain passive.

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 c5 3.g3 e6 4.♘f3 b6 5.♗g2 ♗b7 6.0–0 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 0–0 9.♖d1 d6 10.♗g5 ♘c6 11.♕d2 ♕b8 12.h3 ♖d8 13.♖ac1 h6 14.♗e3 ♖d7 15.b3 ♕f8 16.♘d4 ♘xd4 17.♗xd4 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 ♖c8



19.e4

This move establishes a hedgehog-type position under favourable circumstances, since the ...d6-d5 break is hard to accomplish and unlikely to succeed.

19...♘e8

If 19...♕d8 20.♕e2 ♕c7 21.f4 ♕c6 22.♖d3 a6 23.a4± Black will hardly achieve a break, while a kingside attack with g3-g4-g5 has a good chance to succeed.

The break 19...d5? loses a pawn after 20.exd5 exd5 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♘xd5.

Of course 19...e5?! 20.♗e3 gives a stable advantage to White, and is similar to the game Tiviakov – Anand from the previous chapter.

20.♕e2 ♗f6 21.♗e3!?

White is in no hurry to make further exchanges, as they are unnecessary. White enjoys some space advantage, while Black no longer has enough material to create serious tactical threats. Unfortunately, this move is tactically imprecise as it gives Black some chances for a ...d6-d5 break.

A safer option was 21.♖d3 ♗xd4 22.♖xd4 a6 23.♕e3 ♖b7 24.a4 ♖bc7 25.♖cd1± when Black faces problems, in similar style to the game.

21...♕e7

The trade 21...♗xc3 22.♖xc3 does not help, as after 22...♕e7 (22...d5? is refuted by 23.exd5 exd5 24.♗xh6!± since 24...gxh6? loses to 25.♕g4†) 23.♖cd3± White dominates the board and his bishop is far stronger than Black's knight. He may proceed with the plans a4-a5 or f4-g4-h4-g5 with a big advantage in either case.

22.♖d3?!

An imprecision which could have allowed Black to free his position.

If 22.f4 ♗xc3 23.♖xc3 d5! and Black releases his position.

Better though was 22.♖c2 since the try 22...♗xc3 23.♖xc3 d5? (or 23...♘f6!? 24.♗c1 followed by ♖cd3) is now refuted by 24.♖cd3 ♘f6 25.exd5 exd5 26.♕f3 when White is simply winning a pawn.

22...♖dd8?!

Missing an opportunity.

A better try was 22...♗xc3 23.♖cxc3 d5! as after 24.cxd5 ♖xc3 25.♖xc3 exd5 26.exd5 ♖xd5 27.♖c8± White's advantage is rather small.

23.♕d2 ♕b7

Threatening ...♗xc3 followed by ...♕xe4.

Now 23...♗xc3 is met by 24.♖dxc3! d5 25.cxd5 ♖xc3 26.♕xc3 exd5 27.e5!± with a structural advantage.

24.f3 ♗e5 25.a4 a6 26.♖d1 ♗f6

White's position is rock solid, and Black has nothing better than waiting.

If 26...♘c7?! attempting ...b6-b5, then 27.♗d4! highlights the weakness of the d6-pawn: 27...♗xd4 28.♖xd4 And now White is winning a pawn after: 28...b5 (or 28...♘e8 29.e5!±) 29.cxb5 axb5 30.♖b4±

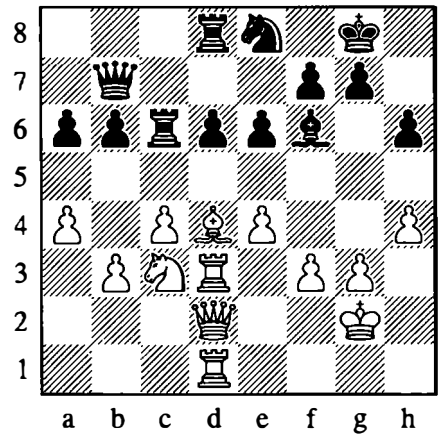
27.h4

Advancing on the kingside; White intends to follow up with g4-g5.

27...♖c6 28.♗d4!

White is now ready to attack on the kingside with g4-g5, therefore he must first remove Black's bishop from f6.

But not 28.g4?! ♗xh4 when things are far from clear.



28...♗xd4 29.♖xd4 ♖dc8 30.g4 ♖c5 31.♖d3

The try 31.g5 is worthy of consideration, but after: 31...♕e7 (instead 31...hxg5 32.hxg5 ♕e7 33.f4 is very dangerous for Black, for example 33...b5 34.♖h1 bxc4 35.b4! ♖5c7 36.♕e3 ♕d7 37.♕h3 ♔f8 38.♕h8† ♔e7 39.♕g8! followed by ♖h8 with deadly threats) 32.f4 g6 The game remains complex.

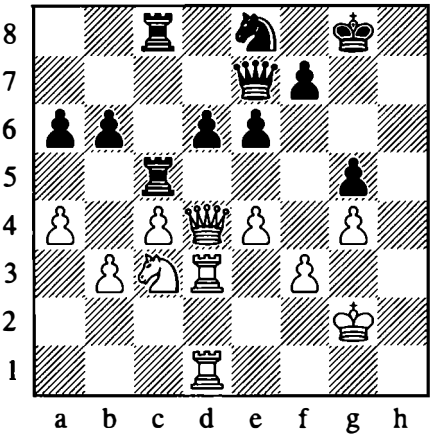
31...♕e7 32.♕f2

Black's lack of an active plan is unnerving. White may simply speculate with multiple threats, while Black is always responsible for calculating whether concrete threats, such as f3-f4 or g4-g5, are working. Black did not resist the pressure and unnecessarily weakened his position with:

32...g5?!

Better was 32...♕b7! though after 33.♕e1!?± White keeps all his options open (but not 33.f4? b5!⇄ when Black frees his position).

33.hxg5 hxg5 34.♕d4!±



Black is now in serious trouble, due to the threat of ♖h1.

34...♖8c6

The try 34...♕f8 would be met by: 35.a5! bxa5 (35...♖xa5?! 36.♕xb6) 36.♘a4 ♖5c6 37.e5 dxe5 38.♕xe5±

35.♘a2

Threatening ♘b4xa6.

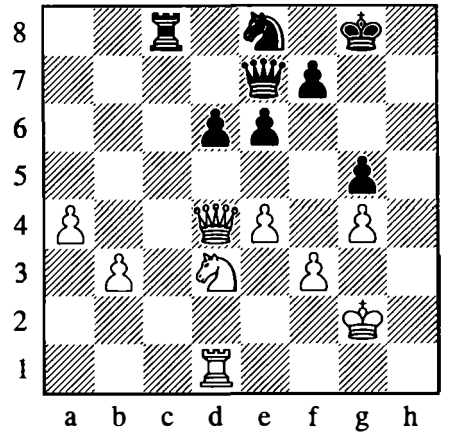
35...b5

If 35...a5 the b5-square is weakened and after 36.♘c3 ♘c7 37.♘b5 ♘xb5 38.axb5 ♖c7 39.♖h1 e5 40.♕xd6 the endgame is won for White.

36.♘b4 ♖c8

Or 36...♖b6 37.cxb5 axb5 38.a5 ♖b8 39.♖c3 when the passed pawn and excellent piece coordination should secure a win for White.

37.♘xa6 bxc4 38.♘xc5 cxd3 39.♘xd3+–



The connected passed pawns give White a decisive advantage, which Eljanov converted in convincing fashion: **White won.**

Final remarks

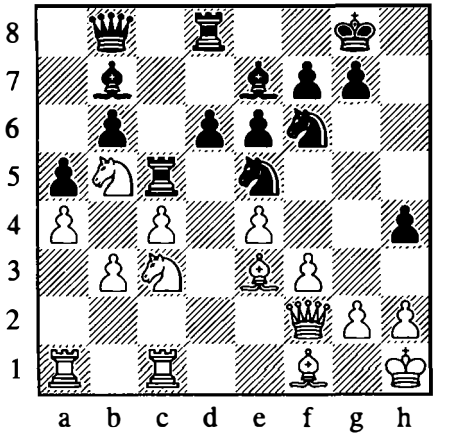
1. The absence of two minor pieces did not solve Black's space problem, but it did deprive him of the ...d6-d5 break.
2. The d6-pawn proved a serious weakness throughout the game. Black's main chance to survive was based on the ...d6-d5 break, which White should not have allowed when he played the imprecise 21.♖d3.

L. Dominguez Perez – Dmitry Andreikin

Capablanca Memorial, Havana 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates the initiative Black may gain after a well-executed ...d6-d5 central break.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♗d2 ♕c7 8.a3 ♗e7 9.♗e3 d6 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 b6 12.♕d2 ♗b7 13.f3 ♘bd7 14.♖fc1 ♖ac8 15.a4 a5 16.♘db5 ♕b8 17.♗f4 ♘e5 18.b3 ♖fd8 19.♔h1 h5 20.♗f1 h4 21.♕f2 ♖c5 22.♗e3



The game has reached a relatively standard middlegame position. Black has advanced his h-pawn, which is often helpful to create kingside threats, and to support an attack along the a8-h1 diagonal. All of Black's forces are ready for the following break:

22...d5!

This is both logical and very strong.

23.exd5

The optimistic 23.♗xc5? loses after: 23...♗xc5 24.♕xh4 (or 24.♕e2 dxe4 25.♘xe4 ♗xe4 26.fxe4 ♘eg4–+ threatening h2 and f2) 24...dxe4 25.fxe4 ♘eg4 With deadly kingside threats, such as after 26.♖c2 g6! 27.♘d1 ♔g7 followed by ...♖h8 winning on the spot.

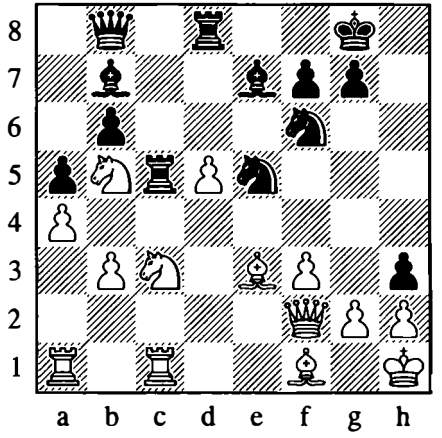
The option 23.cxd5 exd5 24.♘xd5 ♘xd5 25.exd5 ♗xd5 is also good for Black, since 26.♗xc5 ♗xc5 27.♕xh4? (better is 27.♖xc5!?) is refuted by 27...♘xf3! because the bishop is untouchable due to: 28.gxf3? (or 28.♕h3 ♘g5 29.♕h4 ♘e4∓) 28...♗xf3† 29.♗g2 ♗xg2† 30.♔xg2 ♕b7†! With forced mate after: 31.♔h3 ♕f3† 32.♕g3 ♕h5† 33.♔g2 ♖d2†

23...exd5 24.cxd5

The alternative 24.♗xc5 ♗xc5 25.♕xh4 dxc4 yields a complex position, since the natural 26.bxc4? (instead 26.♖d1 gives a dynamic balance) is losing after: 26...♘xf3! 27.♕g3 (or 27.gxf3 ♗xf3† 28.♗g2 ♗xg2† 29.♔xg2 ♖d2† as suggested by Kritz: 30.♔f1 ♕a8 is checkmating) 27...♘g4! 28.♖a2 ♕xg3 29.hxg3 ♘g5! With the deadly threat ...g6, ...♔g7, ...♖h8#.

24...h3!

Undermining White's kingside, especially the f3-pawn which will be vulnerable after Black takes on d5.

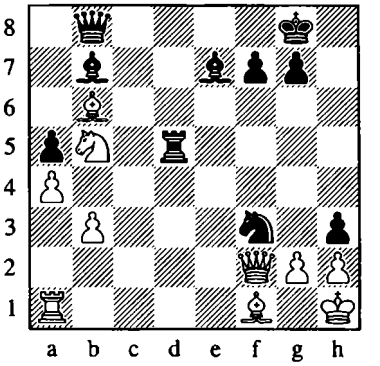


25.♖d1

An alternative was 25.♗xc5 ♗xc5 26.♕g3 hxg2† 27.♗xg2 ♘h5 28.♕g5 ♘d3 29.♖f1 ♘df4!?∞ when Black's active pieces fully compensate for the exchange.

25...♘xd5 26.♗xc5

If 26.♘xd5 ♖cxd5 27.♖xd5 ♖xd5 the pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal gives Black a big advantage, for example 28.♗xb6 is met by the brilliant: 28...♘xf3! (or 28...♖d2! with a crushing attack)



29.gxf3 (but not 29.♕xf3? ♖xb5 30.♕f2 ♖xb6! winning a piece, since if 31.♕xb6 ♗xg2†) 29...♖d2! 30.♗e2 (30.♕xd2? ♗xf3† 31.♔g1 ♕xb6† 32.♘d4 ♗c5–+; 30.♕g3? ♗xf3†!–+) 30...♕f4 Threatening ...♖xe2, and after 31.♘c3 ♖c2 32.♘e4 ♗xe4 33.fxe4 ♕xf2 34.♗xf2 ♖xe2 White is in a hopeless position.

26...♗xc5 27.♕g3

Even though White is an exchange up, it is Black who is playing for the win, as all his pieces became extremely active due to the ...d6-d5 break.

27...♘xc3 28.♖xd8†?

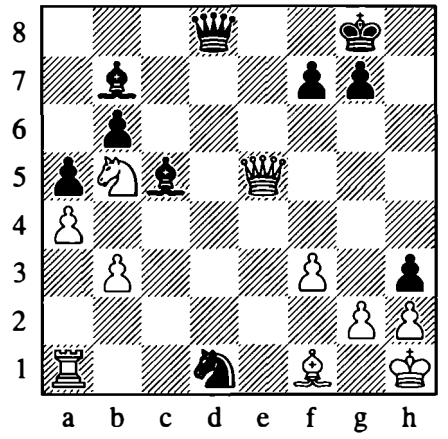
A mistake leading to a premature end; White miscalculated Black's powerful threats.

Correct was 28.♘xc3 and after the forced line: 28...hxg2† 29.♗xg2 ♗d4 30.f4 ♗xg2† 31.♕xg2 ♗xc3 32.♖xd8† ♕xd8 33.♖c1 ♗b2! 34.♕xb2 ♘d3 35.♕d2 ♕a8† 36.♔g1 ♘xc1 37.♕xc1 ♕d8 Black has a tiny plus in a drawish endgame.

28...♕xd8 29.♕xe5

29.♘xc3? doesn't help: 29...♕d4! when Black is winning due to the threats ...♕xc3 and ...♕g1#: 30.♗e2 (or 30.♘e2 ♕xa1–+) 30...hxg2† 31.♔xg2 ♕xc3–+

29...♘d1!–+



Threatening ...♘f2† followed by a discovered check.

30.♖a2

30.♖xd1 ♕xd1 31.♕e2 ♕xb3 and wins.

30...♘e3 31.♘c3

31.♕a1 also fails due to 31...♕d5! with deadly threats, such as after: 32.♖e2 hxg2† 33.♗xg2 ♕xf3! 34.♗xf3 ♗xf3† 35.♔g1 ♘c2† 36.♔f1 ♗xe2† 37.♔xe2 ♘xa1

31...♘xf1 32.♖e2 ♘d2 33.♕g3 hxg2† 34.♖xg2 g6
0–1

Final remarks

1. The ...d6-d5 break gave Black great dynamic chances as all his pieces became active. Nearly every variation contained brilliant sacrifices and attacking ideas.
2. Black's plan ...h7-h5-h4-h3 was very strong, and should be considered an integral part of the ...d6-d5 break, as it gives great winning chances to Black.

Twan Burg – Emilio Cordova

Barcelona 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White's routine play can be met by a strong kingside attack with ...♔h8, ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5-g4.

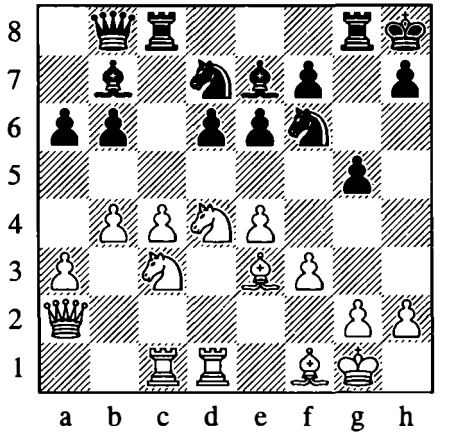
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 a6 3.c4 e6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♗d2 ♕c7 8.a3 ♗e7 9.♗e3 d6 10.♗e2 b6 11.♖c1 0–0 12.0–0 ♗b7 13.f3 ♘bd7 14.b4 ♖ac8 15.♕b3?!

A questionable move, since a queen on b3 is unlikely to contribute to any of White's plans in the hedgehog. A better choice was 15.♘a4!? in similar style to previous examples.

15...♕b8 16.♖fd1 ♔h8 17.♗f1 ♖g8 18.♕a2?!

Again, what is the point of this move? It is true that most hedgehog positions offer a stable advantage for White, but simply waiting gives Black strong counterplay which can start right now:

18...g5!



This is an important moment in the game. After a series of routine moves by White, the initiative has passed into Black's hands, and he wishes to create a kingside attack.

19.h3

This move is often played to momentarily stop ...g5-g4. If Black wants to insist on ...g5-g4 then he will have to push ...h7-h5, further exposing his own king.

A worthy alternative was 19.♕b1!? supporting the e4-pawn. 19...♕a8!? Pressing on e4, and preparing ...g5-g4 once again (but not 19...g4?! 20.f4!± when White retains a good position since the kingside will stay closed). 20.♗d3 ♘e5 (again 20...g4?! is met by 21.f4!±) 21.♘a4 ♘fd7 The position remains unclear, and it seems White will have to play h2-h3 after all.

19...h5!

Black insists on his idea of ...g5-g4.

20.♕d2

The move 20.♕f2 temporarily prevents ...g5-g4, but it is not enough to prevent this break in the long term after: 20...♖g6! (the premature 20...g4? loses to 21.hxg4 hxg4 22.♕h4† and Black is finished after either 22...♘h7 23.♕xe7 or 22...♔g7 23.♕h6#.) Black is insisting on the threat of ...g5-g4, and now White does not seem to have any useful moves since preventing the break with 21.g4?! weakens the dark squares, and after 21...♘e5∓ Black's position is preferable.

20...g4

White's position now becomes unpleasant.

21.hxg4

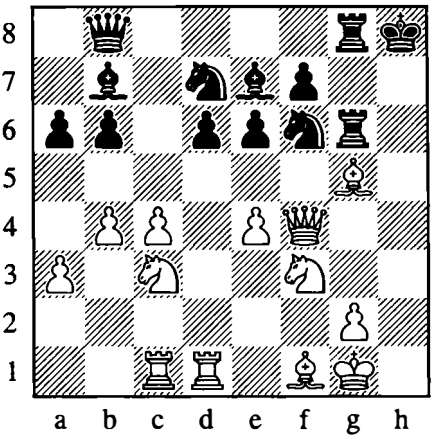
Black is also doing well after 21.h4!? gxf3 22.♘xf3 ♖g6∓ when Black's chances are preferable at least on a practical level. Controlling the e5-square and the g-file are dreams for hedgehog players.

21...hxg4 22.♗g5?

White's hopes for kingside activity are destined to fail.

Much better was 22.f4! keeping the g-file closed: 22...♘xe4 (or 22...♗xe4!? 23.♘xe4 ♘xe4 24.♕b2 ♔h7 25.♗d3 ♕b7 26.♕e2∞) 23.♘xe4 ♗xe4 24.♘e2 (threatening ♕d4) 24...♗g6 (but not 24...♗b7? 25.♗d4† ♔h7 26.♘g3+– when Black cannot defend against ♗d3 followed by ♔f2 and ♖h1) 25.♘g3∞ White's compensation for his pawn deficit is Black's exposed king.

22...gxf3 23.♘xf3 ♖g6 24.♕f4 ♖cg8∓

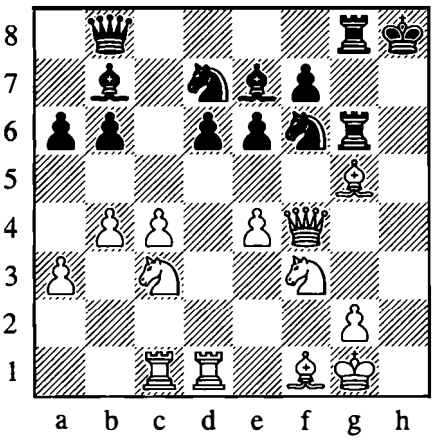


Black's advantage is practically decisive. The reasons for such an advantage are quite evident:

1. White has two very serious weaknesses – the e4- and g2-pawns.
2. Black has innumerable threats along the g-file.
3. White is practically unable to create counterplay, and there are no weaknesses in Black's camp.

The rest of the game serves as an example of how to realize Black's advantage:

25.♕h4† ♔g7 26.♗d3 ♖h8 27.♕f4



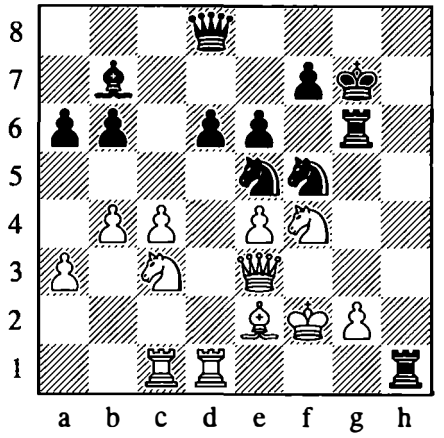
27...♘h5!–+

Beyond tactical details, note how Black trades dark-squared bishops emphasizing White's positional weaknesses. The rest is simple, and needs little comment.

28.♕e3 ♗xg5 29.♘xg5 ♘e5 30.♗e2 ♕d8 31.♘h3 ♘g3

Threatening ...♖xh3.

32.♘f4 ♖h1† 33.♔f2 ♘f5!



The knight is untouchable!

34.♖xh1

34.exf5? ♕h4† 35.g3 ♕h2† 36.♘g2 ♕xg2#

34...♘xe3 35.♘xg6 ♘3g4† 36.♗xg4 ♘xg4† 37.♔g3 ♕g5 38.♖h4 ♘e5† 39.♔h3 ♘xg6 40.♖d1 ♕xh4#

Final remarks

1. Black's kingside plan was very strong against White's passive play.
2. White could have stayed in the game by keeping the f-file closed with 22.f4! sacrificing a pawn.
3. Once the g-file is open, the game is practically lost. White should find a way to avoid such types of position at all costs.

Alexander Galkin – Aleksander Delchev

Ohrid 2001

Learning objective: This fragment of a game is an additional example of the ...♖g8 and ...g7-g5 plan.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 b6 9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.♗e3 ♘e5 12.f3 0–0 13.♕d2 ♕c7 14.♖fd1 ♖ac8 15.♖ac1 ♕b8

The game has developed as usual and now the real fight begins.

16.♕e1 ♗d8 17.♕f2?!

White's play is imprecise. A better move order was 17.♔h1 ♗c7 18.♕g1 ♘ed7 where White has an extra tempo compared to the game, and after 19.♘c2± we have a typical hedgehog position.

17...♘ed7 18.♔h1 ♗c7 19.♕g1

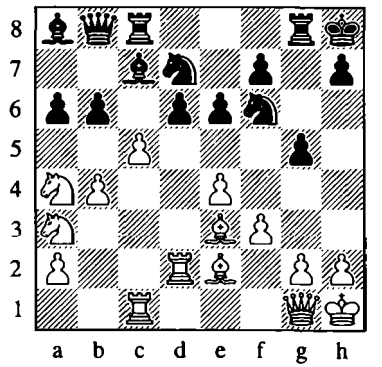
Protecting the h2-pawn.

19...♔h8!?

Black announces his intention to play ...♖g8 followed by ...g7-g5-g4.

20.♖c2

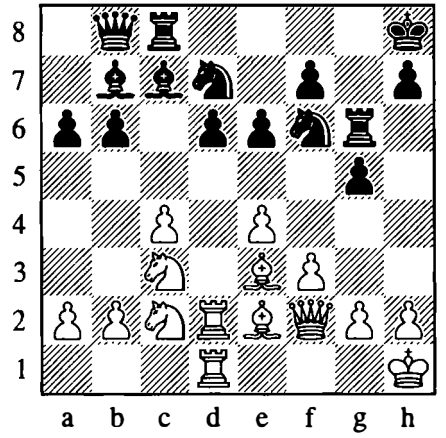
A useful piece of advice for players of the white pieces is the following: you should be ready to meet ...g7-g5 with c4-c5 opening the queenside with counterplay. Therefore, the move 20.b4!? makes perfect sense, and after: 20...♖g8 21.♘a4 ♗a8 22.♖d2 g5 23.c5!±



White is just in time, and the subsequent complications will probably favour White due to Black's weakened kingside.

20...♖g8 21.♖cd2 g5 22.♕f2 ♖g6 23.♘c2

An alternative was: 23.♗d3!? (threatening e4-e5) 23...♖g7 (but not 23...♘e5?! 24.♗xb6 g4 25.♗xc7 ♕xc7 26.♗e2 gxf3 27.♗xf3 ♘fg4 28.♕d4± when Black does not have enough compensation) 24.h3 h5 25.♗d4 ♖cg8 26.♘c2 ♕d8!?∞ The break ...g5-g4 is a double-edged weapon due to White's well-placed bishops.



23...♖cg8

Black's position remains solid and flexible; he could play ...g5-g4 or just prepare it further with ...h7-h5.

24.h3 h5 25.♗d4 ♖8g7 26.b4 ♕g8!?

Further reinforcing the ...g5-g4 break, though this might just be unnecessary.

Black was perfectly ready for: 26...g4! 27.h4 (the opening of the h-file after 27.hxg4? only benefits Black: 27...hxg4 28.f4 ♖h6† 29.♔g1 ♗xe4! 30.♘xe4 ♘xe4 31.♗xg7† ♔xg7 32.♕e3 d5!–+) 27...♕d8!? The h4-pawn will soon become a serious weakness.

27.♔g1 g4 28.fxg4

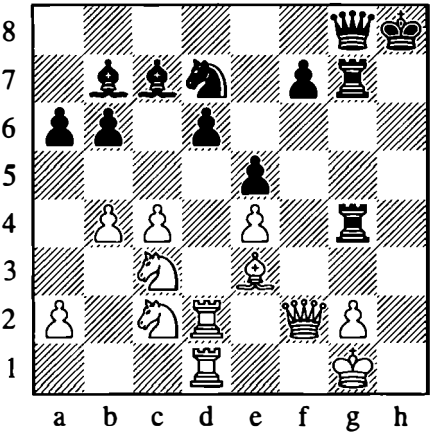
Keeping lines closed with 28.h4 does not help much after 28...gxf3 29.♗xf3 ♕d8 as Black is much better due to the weak pawns on e4, g2 and h4.

The try 28.hxg4 hxg4 29.f4 is nearly suicidal after 29...♕h7 30.♔f1 g3 31.♕f3 e5 32.♗g1 ♖h6 (or 32...♖g4!?) and Black's attack is deadly.

28...hxg4 29.♗xg4

After 29.h4 g3 30.♕f3 e5 31.♗e3 ♖h7 White cannot even defend the h4-pawn: 32.♗g5? ♖xg5 33.hxg5 ♖h1†! 34.♔xh1 ♕h7†–+

29...e5 30.♗e3 ♘xg4 31.hxg4 ♖xg4∓



Black has achieved another dream hedgehog position and he imposed his advantage in 12 more moves: **Black won.**

Final remarks

1. Generally speaking, protecting the h2-pawn with ♗g1 is somewhat healthier than protecting it with ♕g1. However, if White wishes to use the queen for this purpose, he certainly should not lose a tempo by playing ♕e1-f2-g1 as in the game.
2. **Important:** White should be ready to meet ...g7-g5 with a c4-c5 break.
3. Once again, after Black accomplishes the ...g5-g4 break, things do not look good for White in practically every variation.

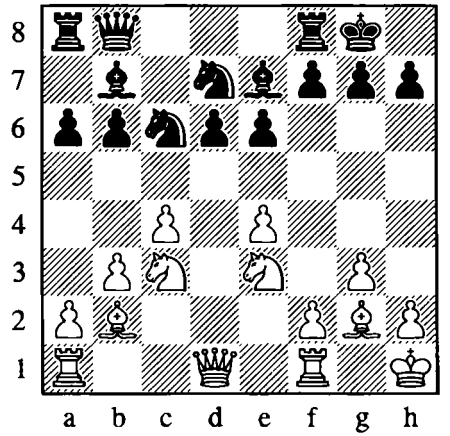
Miguel Munoz Pantoja – Julio Granda Zuniga

La Roda 2013

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of Black's ...b6-b5 break when White's bishop is placed on g2 rather than the f1-a6 diagonal.
2. Something to understand about this position is that White's queenside plans are no longer a priority in this position, while a kingside attack is a much more suitable idea.
3. Black's ...d6-d5 break is now nearly impossible, but as we see in this game, the ...b6-b5 break is quite likely to be accomplished.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.♘c3 ♗b7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 d6 7.g3 ♘e7 8.♗g2 ♘ec6 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.b3 0–0 11.♗b2 a6 12.♘c2 ♘d7 13.♘e3 ♕b8 14.♔h1



14...♖a7!?

This strange-looking move is the start of an interesting plan for Black. He will proceed with ...♗a8, ...♖c7 and ...♖fc8 in order to strengthen the ...b6-b5 break.

A healthy option was: 14...b5!? 15.f4 (or 15.cxb5?! axb5 16.♘xb5 ♗a6 17.a4 ♗xb5 18.axb5 ♕xb5∓ and the b3-pawn is weak) 15...♗f6 (but not 15...bxc4?! 16.♘xc4± when the d6-pawn is vulnerable) 16.a3 ♖d8 17.♖b1 ♕a7 18.♘g4 bxc4 19.♘xf6† ♘xf6 20.bxc4 ♖ab8 Black is slightly better since none of White's standard plans work here and the c4-pawn is somewhat vulnerable.

15.f4 ♗a8 16.a3

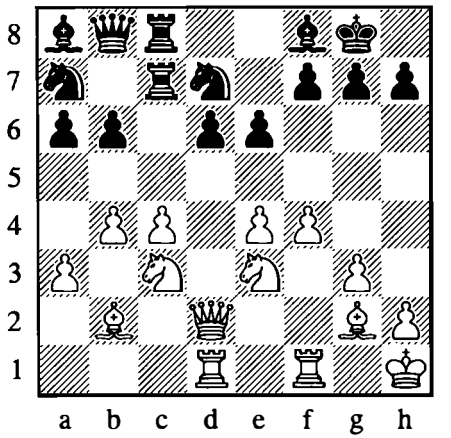
White is unlikely to profit from advancing his queenside pawns.

Instead, White should focus on the kingside with 16.♕e2!? ♖c8 17.♖ad1!? (or 17.g4 b5 18.g5 with mutual chances) 17...b5 18.f5 ♘de5 19.fxe6 fxe6 20.♗h3 ♘d8 21.♘cd5!? exd5 22.♗xe5 dxe5 23.♗xc8 ♕xc8 24.cxd5± with a complicated position.

16...♖c8 17.b4 ♗f8 18.♕d2 ♖ac7 19.♖ad1 ♘a7!?

A daring idea: Black moves away from the centre in order to prepare the ...b6-b5 break followed by recapturing with a knight. This idea however entails some risks.

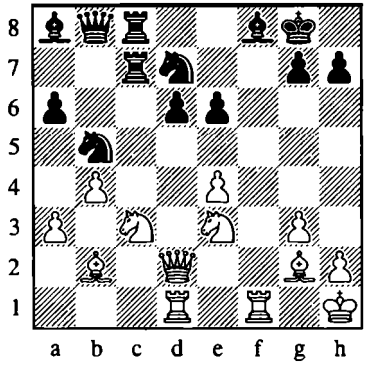
The break 19...b5!? is not so favourable, as after 20.cxb5 axb5 21.♕d3 ♘a7 the b5-pawn needs protection, therefore White remains a little better. A possible continuation is 22.f5!? ♘e5 23.♕d2 ♘ac6 24.♖f2 when Black's kingside is in danger.



20.♖c1?

Wasting a crucial tempo and directing energies in the wrong direction.

Far stronger was 20.f5! creating serious kingside threats: 20...b5!? (Black's position is risky after 20...♘e5 21.fxe6 fxe6 22.♖xf8†!? [or the computer-like 22.b5!± blocking the knight on a7] 22...♖xf8 23.♕xd6 ♖c6 24.♕d4± with pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal) 21.cxb5 ♘xb5 22.fxe6 fxe6



23.♘e2!± The e6-pawn is particularly weak.

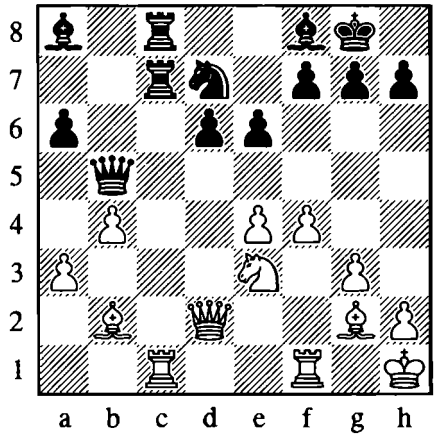
20...b5!

Black achieves the key break for his position. White's position becomes vulnerable due to over-expansion.

21.cxb5 ♘xb5 22.♘xb5

Or 22.♘e2 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 24.♕xc1 ♗e7 with level chances.

22...♕xb5

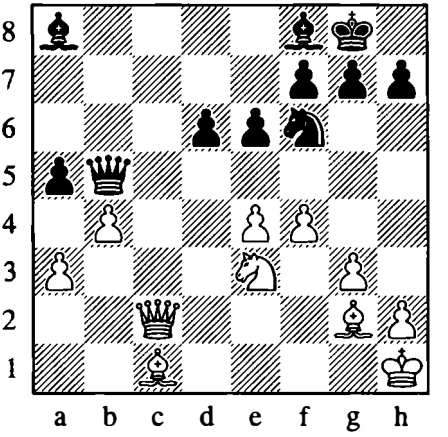


It is now White who must play for equality, as the e4-pawn has become vulnerable and Black no longer suffers a space disadvantage.

23.♖xc7 ♖xc7 24.♖c1 ♖xc1† 25.♗xc1?!

Better was 25.♕xc1 a5!? with mutual chances.

25...♘f6 26.♕c2 a5!



Now White is in trouble, as his queenside and e4-pawn are vulnerable.

27.♕c4

After 27.bxa5? ♕xa5 White has no satisfactory answer to the threat of ...♕e1: 28.♕d2 (28.♔g1 ♕e1† 29.♘f1 ♘xe4–+) 28...♕xd2 29.♗xd2 ♗xe4∓

An option was 27.♗d2 ♕e2 28.♕d1 ♕xd1† 29.♘xd1 axb4 30.axb4 ♘xe4∓ although only Black can play for a win.

27...♕b6!?

Keeping more pieces on the board.

The alternative 27...♕xc4 28.♘xc4 axb4 29.axb4 ♗xe4∓ gives good winning chances too.

28.b5

Again after 28.bxa5? ♕xa5∓ the threat of ...♕e1 is very unpleasant.

28...♘xe4!

This tactical blow reminds us of how many resources Black gains once a central break has been achieved.

29.♗xe4 d5 30.♕c8!

White realizes he needs activity to stay in the game.

The try 30.♘xd5? loses immediately to 30...exd5 31.♗xd5 ♕e6! making use of two pins.

30...♗b7 31.♕b8 dxe4∓

Black has a clear extra pawn and faces no problems in imposing his superiority.

32.a4

Threatening ♗a3.

32...♕c5! 33.♗d2 ♕d4 34.♕xb7 ♕xd2 35.♕xe4 g6 36.♘g4??

The final mistake. More stubborn was 36.♘c4 ♕d1† 37.♔g2 ♕xa4 38.b6 ♕b5∓ though Black retains a big advantage.

36...♕d1† 37.♔g2 ♕xg4 38.b6 ♕f5

White resigns as there is no hope after 39.♕a8 ♔g7 40.b7 due to 40...♕d5†! when checkmate is unstoppable. For example: 41.♔h3 ♕h5† 42.♔g2 ♕e2† 43.♔h3 ♕f1† 44.♔g4 h5† 45.♔h4 ♗e7#

0–1

Final remarks

1. White's most important mistake in this game was not developing a kingside attack with 20.f5.
2. This game illustrates how Black's ...b6-b5 break weakens White's queenside and centre.

John Bartholomew – Timur Gareev

USA 2009

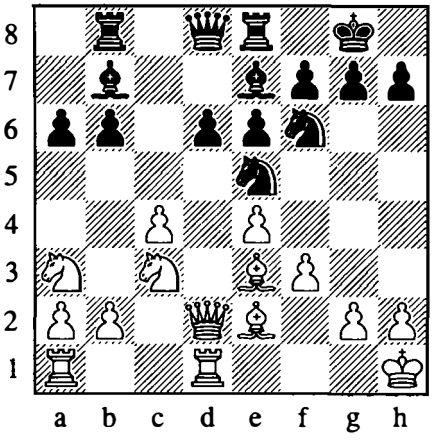
Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates how Black can carry out a *waiting strategy* without damaging his position.
2. Black prepares many plans, and speculates with tactical ideas, but does not carry out any of them.
3. Black requires great calculating ability to carry out this strategy, as one slip can give White an overwhelming initiative, probably through a queenside attack. Both sides must constantly check the consequences of both White's and Black's breaks in this structure.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 ♗e7 9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 b6 11.♗e3 ♖b8

This prophylactic move gives extra protection to the b6-pawn.

12.♕d2 ♗b7 13.♖fd1 ♘e5 14.f3 ♖e8 15.♔h1



So far both sides follow the standard developing moves. Something to note is White's awkwardly-placed knight on a3. White would like to transfer this knight to a better square, say after ♘c2-d4; but this is not always easy due to the pressure on the c4-pawn.

15...♗f8

The premature 15...d5? would be met by: 16.♗f4! ♗d6 17.cxd5 exd5 18.♘c4! Quite an unpleasant surprise! 18...♘xc4 19.♗xc4 dxc4 20.♗xd6 ♖c8 21.♕d4±

16.♗f1

The attempt to improve the knight with 16.♘c2 is met by 16...♕c7 attacking the c4-pawn, since the natural 17.b3?! (better is 17.♘a4 ♗c6 18.♘c3 ♗b7=) is met by 17...d5! opening the centre favourably after: 18.exd5 exd5 19.♘xd5 ♘xd5 20.cxd5 ♖bd8 21.♗f1 ♖xd5∓ Black has gained the initiative.

16...♕c7

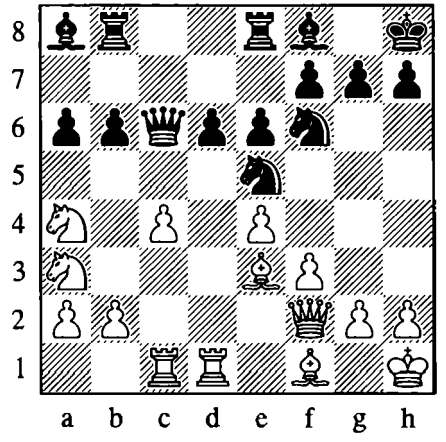
Again, the break 16...d5? is met by 17.♗f4! ♗d6 18.cxd5 exd5 19.♘c4!± as in the note above.

17.♖ac1 ♗a8 18.♕f2 ♔h8 19.♘a4

If White tries 19.♘c2 intending to follow up with ♘d4, then after 19...♘xc4 20.♗xc4 ♕xc4 the optimistic 21.♗xb6? is refuted by: 21...♕c6 22.♗e3 ♖xb2∓

19...♕c6!

A more standard reply would be 19...♘ed7 but then White could play 20.♘c2! followed by ♘d4, when White's chances are slightly preferable.



20.♘c3

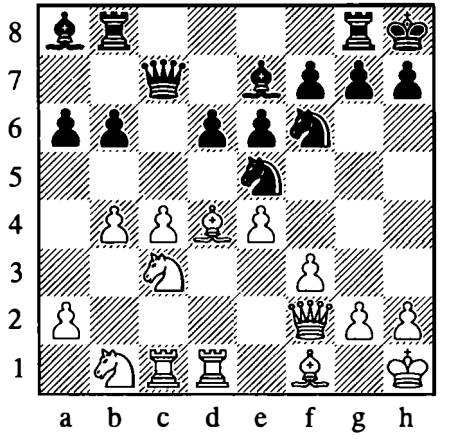
The tempting 20.♘xb6? is refuted by 20...♘fg4! when Black regains the material favourably after 21.fxg4 ♘xg4 22.♕e2 ♘xe3 23.♕xe3 ♕xb6 24.♕xb6 ♖xb6∓ with better chances due to the pair of bishops and weakened dark squares.

20...♗e7 21.♘ab1 ♖g8

Black is ready to create active play on the kingside with ...g7-g5.

22.♗d4 ♕c7 23.b4!

A good decision. As mentioned previously, White should try to meet the ...g7-g5 plan with a well-timed c4-c5 break.



23...♖gc8!?

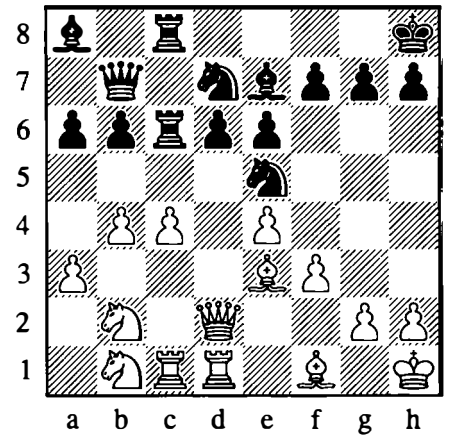
A curious approach; Black was ready to play ...g7-g5, but now simply decides to go for a different plan. It is typically a mistake to waste three moves on a plan and later choose to do something else. But sometimes in the hedgehog Black can afford such a decision due to the amazing flexibility of the structure.

White was well prepared to meet 23...g5 with: 24.♘d2 ♖g6 (or 24...g4 25.f4±) 25.♘a4 ♘ed7 26.c5! Breaking on the queenside! 26...bxc5 27.bxc5 dxc5 28.♘xc5 ♗xc5 29.♗xc5 ♘xc5 30.♖xc5 ♕e7 31.♖dc1± When the g5-pawn is more a weakness than a strength.

24.♘a4 ♘fd7 25.♗e3 ♕b7

Black now seems to be preparing a ...b6-b5 break.

26.a3 ♖c6 27.♘b2 ♖bc8 28.♕d2



28...♕c7

The break 28...b5? does not work well because after 29.cxb5 axb5 30.♘c3± the b5-pawn is lost. As it turns out, when White's knight can reach c3 so easily and White's bishop is on f1, the ...b6-b5 break is unlikely to work well. White is nearly winning after 30...♘c4 31.♘xc4 bxc4 32.b5 ♖6c7 33.a4 due to the connected passed pawns.

29.a4 ♕b8

It is amazing how Black continues to wait without causing any deterioration in his position. It seems Black has not done anything, however he has carefully analyzed White's threats, and is ready to meet them.

30.b5?!

This is not the right timing for this break, as the b6- and d6-pawns do not become targets as they did in the game Flores Rios – Hayrapetian earlier in this chapter.

Better was 30.♘c3!? and a possible continuation would be 30...♖6c7 31.♕f2 ♖d8 32.♗e2 with roughly equal chances.

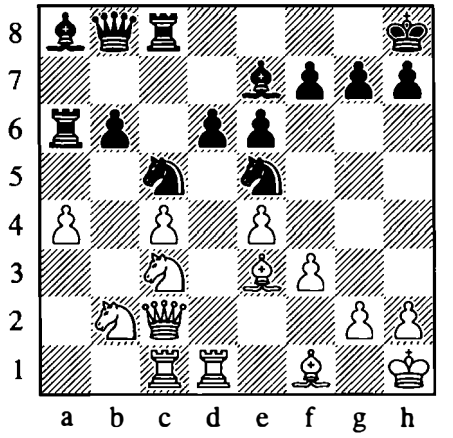
30...♖6c7!

Worse is 30...axb5?! 31.axb5 since now White has a potential threat ♘c3-a4 attacking the b6-pawn. In addition, the potentially weak a4-pawn has been traded. The play could continue 31...♖6c7 32.♘c3 ♖a7 33.♘ca4 ♕c7 34.♕f2 ♖b8 35.♖a1 with a level game.

31.bxa6

In the event of 31.♘c3 a5! White does not have any breaks on the queenside and Black may turn his attention back to the kingside by playing ...♖g8 followed by ...g7-g5. For example: 32.♗g5!? Preventing Black's plan momentarily. 32...♗f8 33.♗e2 h6 34.♗h4 g5 35.♗g3 ♘c5∓ White's position is unpleasant in practice, as he does not have a clear-cut plan.

31...♘c5 32.♕c2 ♖a7 33.♘c3 ♖xa6∓



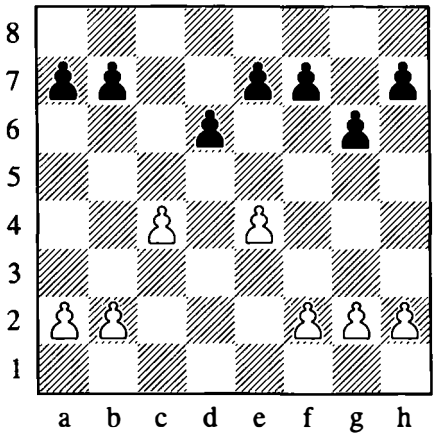
Black's strategy has been successful and his position is now preferable due to his strong knights on c5 and e5. The rest of the game is irrelevant to our purposes, though eventually **Black won**.

Final remarks

1. This game was a test of nerves for both players. Each player attempted to carry out their plans, but found a well-prepared opponent. If Black had played 15...d5 or 23...g5, he would have reached an inferior position. In turn, White lost his patience and broke with 30.b5, which gave him a worse position.
2. This type of position requires great precision in calculation from both sides, since they must constantly check how to prevent or meet their opponent's breaks.

Chapter 11

The Maroczy



The Maroczy structure we study in this chapter bears a great similarity with the Hedgehog from the previous chapter. In fact, some sources may call that chapter's structure Maroczy as well, simply because White has placed his pawns on c4 and e4. In this book, I decided to give a separate treatment to these two structures because I consider they are sufficiently different. The difference is in how Black develops his dark-squared bishop. In the Hedgehog chapter, Black's bishop was always developed on e7, hence ...e7-e6 had been played. Here instead we study those positions where Black fianchettoes his bishop on g7. Most importantly, Black's e-pawn often remains on e7. This fact has the following consequences:

1. White can place a knight on d5, which can lead to a major structural transformation if Black trades the knight.
2. The central break ...d6-d5 is no longer a main theme here.
3. Black can trade pieces without worrying about the d6-pawn becoming vulnerable, as happened in the game Eljanov – Jakovenko from the previous chapter.

The structure we study in this chapter is typical of the Accelerated Dragon, but it can also arise as a transposition from the English Opening or some lines that start out as a King's Indian. It can also occur with reversed colours if White plays the English Opening, allowing Black to reply ...d5 and later ...c5. Most examples in this chapter will come from the Accelerated Dragon because it is the most common source of Maroczy games. Nevertheless the ideas transfer easily to the other lines. The main theme of the Maroczy is White's spatial advantage, which means Black will often attempt to trade pieces and later fight on in the endgame phase.

White's plans

1. Gain space with a queenside expansion, place a knight on d5, and/or expand on the kingside with f2-f4.
2. After f2-f4 has been played, place rooks on the central files and break with either e4-e5 or f4-f5.
3. Place a knight on d5 and wait for Black to capture on d5. Once this happens, White can transform the structure favourably with either exd5 or cxd5. Each of these replies is studied at the beginning of this chapter.

Black's plans

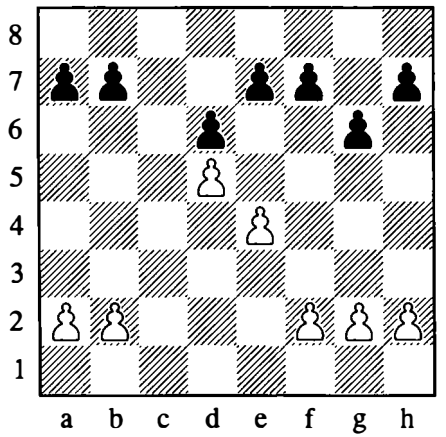
1. Trade pieces to alleviate the space problem.
2. Break on the queenside with ...b6-b5 and after c4xb5 and ...a6xb5 then apply pressure along the a-file.

3. Break on the kingside with ...f7-f5 and later create an attack against White's king.
4. Pressure White's queenside pawns with ...♕b6-b4, and when White plays b2-b3, then ...a7-a5-a4xb3.
5. On rare occasions play ...e7-e6 and later ...d6-d5, though this plan is more typical of the Hedgehog.

Out of the plans mentioned above, it should be said that White's first three plans are more or less equally common, while Black's first three plans are the most common for him. Black's fifth plan is almost never carried out in games which originate from the Accelerated Dragon variation.

Symmetric Transformation

When White places a knight on d5 and Black captures it, White's recapture changes the character of the game dramatically. The first four examples of this chapter discuss White's cxd5 recapture. The next two are examples of the recapture exd5. Then we have two examples of Black's ...f7-f5 break, one example of the ...b7-b5 break, and the chapter concludes with one example exploring White's f4-f5 and e4-e5 breaks.



This structure most typically occurs when we have a Maroczy structure and White places a knight on d5. Once Black captures this knight then White recaptures cxd5. We will call this the symmetric transformation of the Maroczy. The main theme in this structure is White's spatial advantage. As the reader will notice, there are no natural breaks in this position. Black could attempt to challenge White's centre with ...e7-e6 or ...f7-f5, but these breaks mostly weaken Black's camp and can eventually backfire. For this reason, it is easy for Black to run out of useful moves and fall into an inferior position where White expands to ultimately obtain a winning position. Now, let's discuss specific plans for each side.

White's plans

1. Control the c-file and use it for a seventh rank invasion if this is possible.
2. Avoid excessive exchanges in order to make use of the spatial advantage.
3. Further expand on the queenside and kingside, squeeze Black's forces and then find a decisive break.

Black's plans

1. Trade pieces to decrease the space problem.
2. Take possession of the open c-file, and if possible invade the seventh rank with ...♖c2.
3. If White has played b2-b3, then ...a7-a5-a4xb3 can be useful to open another file for counterplay.
4. If the position is already simplified, and White threatens to gain space with flank expansions, then challenge White's centre with ...e7-e6 to create a distraction. This plan can backfire due to the weaknesses created, but they should not be too serious if the queens are already off the board.

As the reader will notice, White's plans of action are far more dangerous than Black's, and this is all a consequence of White's spatial advantage. Black must be careful and understand this structure can lead to a passive position.

The first three examples are illustrations of White's first three plans all combined together to yield very convincing wins. In each of these three examples I will put forward suggestions to avoid losing passively in the way Black lost. Then, the fourth example is a fragment of a game to illustrate one of Black's thematic tricks to find counterplay.

Lev Polugaevsky – Borislav Ivkov

Belgrade 1969

This game is a classical illustration of White's ability to asphyxiate Black's forces after a symmetric transformation.

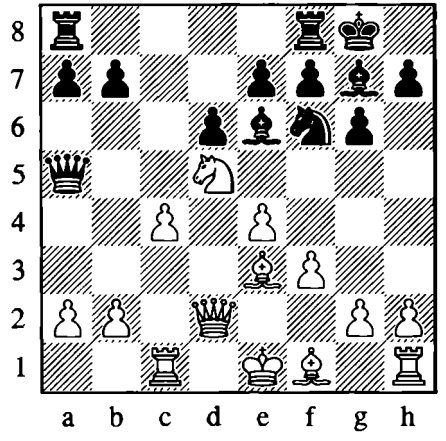
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘xd4 6.♕xd4 g6 7.e4 d6 8.♗e3 ♗g7 9.f3 0–0 10.♕d2 ♗e6 11.♖c1 ♕a5

We have transposed from an English Opening into a popular variation of the Accelerated Dragon.

12.♘d5

This move has fallen out of fashion since 12...♕xa2 offers good chances to Black.

Nowadays 12.b3 is preferred (and we will see this move in the next example) or 12.♗e2 ♖fc8 13.b3.



12...♕xd2†?!

Heading towards an inferior endgame. Instead correct was: 12...♕xa2 13.♘xe7† ♔h8 14.♗e2 ♘g8!?

13.♔xd2 ♗xd5

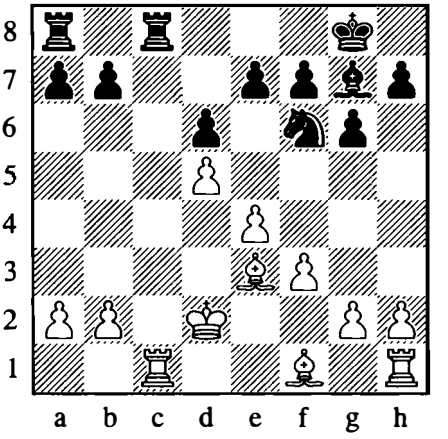
13...♘xd5?! is not good due to 14.cxd5; Black is in trouble after 14...♗c8 (or 14...♗d7 15.♖c7±) 15.b3 e6 16.♗d3 followed by ♖c7.

A good option was 13...♖ae8 and after the semi-forced line 14.♗xa7 ♗xd5 15.cxd5 ♖a8 16.♗e3 ♖xa2 17.♖c2 ♘d7 White preserves a small advantage, but Black has more counterplay than he did in the game.

14.cxd5

We have reached the structure of interest. The c-file is open and for the moment there are no natural breaks to execute. This position has occurred 27 times on my database, and White has scored an amazing 80%.

14...♖fc8



15.♗e2!?±

A simple approach. White has a stable advantage due to his space and pair of bishops. His plan is to expand everywhere on the board and to eventually asphyxiate Black. The lack of targets, or natural structural breaks, prevents Black from creating counterplay.

Much more common is 15.♖xc8† ♖xc8 16.g3! to follow up with ♗h3, when Black loses control of the c-file. For example: 16...♘d7 (16...a6? loses to 17.♗h3 ♖c7 [or 17...♖d8 18.♖c1] 18.♖c1! ♖xc1 19.♔xc1 followed by ♗c8) 17.♗h3 ♖c7 18.♗xd7 ♖xd7 19.b3 a6 20.♖c1± White gains control of the c-file.

15...a6

This is necessary sooner or later, to defend the a7-pawn, but now the b6-square is weak.

15...b6? 16.♗a6± loses the c-file.

16.b4

Beginning the queenside expansion.

16...♔f8

Black cannot fight for queenside space with 16...b5? as it weakens the a6-b5 chain, and after 17.♖xc8† ♖xc8 18.♖c1 ♖xc1 19.♔xc1± White is almost winning due to the threat of a2-a4.

The break 16...e6 17.dxe6 fxe6 weakens Black's position, but secures some space and after 18.a4?! ♔f7 19.a5 d5!? Black has some counterplay. Instead White should play: 18.♔d3! ♘d7 19.f4±

17.a4 ♘d7 18.a5

Now the a6- and b7-pawns are fixed and represent potential weaknesses in the long term.

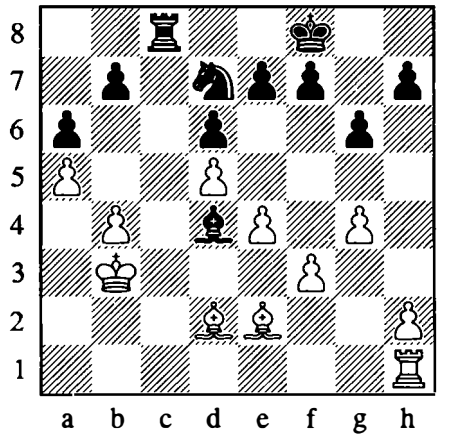
18...♗b2 19.♖c2 ♖xc2† 20.♔xc2 ♗g7 21.♔b3 ♖c8 22.♗d2!

Black cannot use the c-file.

Note how White refrains from 22.♖c1?! ♖xc1 23.♗xc1 in order to keep more pieces on the board.

22...♗d4 23.g4!

Now White will claim space on the kingside.



23...♔g7?!

Black's waiting strategy is a big mistake. Again 23...e6 was correct, as after 24.dxe6 fxe6 25.h4!± Black has many weaknesses, but at least he has space to move.

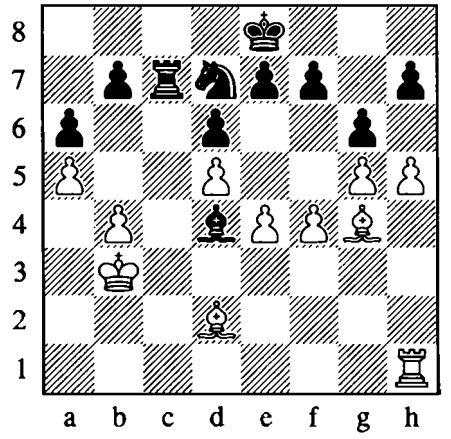
24.g5!

Fixing Black's kingside.

24...♖c7 25.♖d1 ♔f8 26.f4 ♗g7

It was not too late for 26...e6!? 27.dxe6 fxe6 28.♗c4 ♔e7 though after 29.h4!± the threat of h4-h5 is troublesome.

27.♗g4 ♔e8 28.♖f1 ♗d4 29.h4 ♗g7 30.h5 ♗d4 31.♖h1±



Throughout the last eight moves Black's negligent waiting strategy has allowed a powerful

kingside expansion. Although there is no clear winning method yet, White's position is very promising and should be won with correct play.

31...♗g7 32.♖h3 ♔f8 33.h6!

White has found the right plan. Now he will prepare the decisive e4-e5 break, after which Black's main problem will be the weak h7-pawn.

33...♗d4 34.♖d3

White is already winning after: 34.♗c3! ♖xc3† (or 34...♗g1 35.e5! is similar to the game) 35.♖xc3 ♗xc3 36.♔xc3 ♔e8 37.♔d4 ♔d8 38.e5! (threatening the decisive e5-e6) 38...♔c7 39.e6 fxe6 40.♗xe6 ♘f8 41.f5 gxf5 42.♗xf5 ♔d8 43.♗xh7! When the passed pawns decide the game.

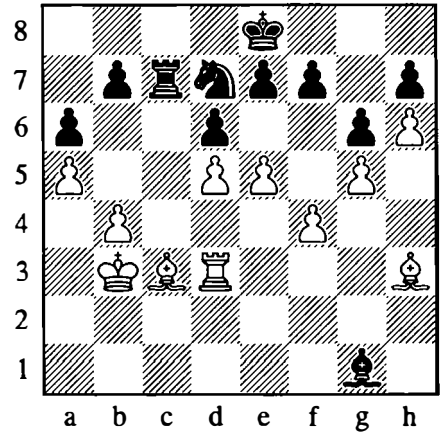
34...♗a7 35.♗h3 ♗g1 36.♗c3

Preparing the e4-e5 break.

36...♔e8

More stubborn was 36...♗h2 though White is still winning, say after: 37.♖f3 ♔e8 38.♗g7 ♔d8 (or 38...♖c1 39.e5! dxe5 40.♗xd7† ♔xd7 41.fxe5) 39.f5! Decisively opening the f-file. The game could have finished with: 39...♖c1 40.fxg6 fxg6 41.♗d4 ♖e1 42.♗b6†! ♘xb6 (or 42...♔e8 43.♗xd7† ♔xd7 44.♖f8 to follow with ♖d8#) 43.axb6 ♔e8 44.♖c3 ♖xe4 45.♗e6! Checkmate is unavoidable.

37.e5!+–



37...♗h2

37...dxe5 38.fxe5 ♗h2 doesn't help due to 39.d6! breaking through the defence. 39...exd6 40.exd6 ♖c6 41.♖e3† ♔d8 42.♖e7 ♖xd6 43.♖xf7 And after 44.♖xh7 the game is decided.

38.exd6 exd6 39.♖e3† ♔d8 40.♖e4

More direct was: 40.♗xd7 ♖xd7 41.♗f6† ♔c7 42.♖e8 ♗xf4 43.♖h8+–

40...♗g1 41.♗xd7!

Black resigns, as there is no hope following: 41...♖xd7 (or 41...♔xd7 42.♗f6 with the deadly threat ♖e7, and if 42...♔c8 then 43.♖e8† ♔d7 44.♖d8#) 42.♗f6† ♔c7 43.♖e8 followed by ♖h8xh7 winning.

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's opening was rather imprecise, leading directly to an unfavourable endgame. Nowadays 12...♕xa2 is the move of choice and in fact White no longer plays 12.♘d5 because of this reply.
2. The endgame resulting after move 14 was indisputably superior for White, and the defence was very difficult in practice.
3. Black's best approach would have been to break the powerful d5-e4 chain with a timely ...e7-e6 break. This weakens the d6- and e6-pawns, but it is the lesser of two evils. Instead, by defending passively Black was signing his own death sentence. White's kingside expansion is a winning plan and passive defence is destined to fail no matter how precise.
4. White's expansion on the flanks was enabled by his pair of bishops and his already existing spatial edge in the centre. By having more space, White is able to gain yet more.

Jan Smeets – Sergei Tiviakov

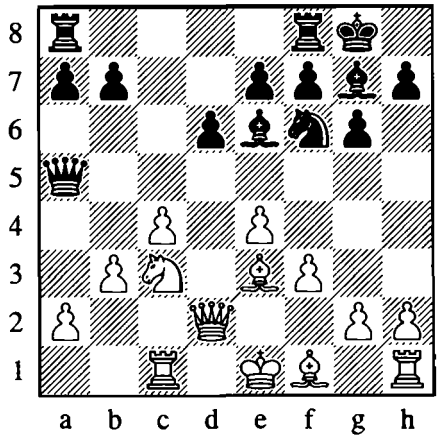
Netherlands 2013

Learning objective: This game is a modern example of White's advantage after a symmetric structure transformation. Notice how White inevitably gains control of the c-file.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♘xd4 7.♕xd4 d6 8.♗e3 ♗g7 9.f3 ♗e6 10.♖c1 0–0 11.♕d2 ♕a5

So far it is the same opening as the previous example, and now:

12.b3



12...a6?

Black confuses his move order!

The main line is 12...♖fc8 and one of the possible continuations is 13.♗e2 (of course now 13.♘d5?! ♕xd2† 14.♔xd2 ♘xd5 15.cxd5 ♗d7 is nothing special for White) 13...a6 14.♘a4 ♕xd2† 15.♔xd2 ♘d7 16.g4!? with a complex and deeply analyzed endgame.

And now of course:

13.♘d5!

This is similar to the previous example except the reply ...♕xa2 is no longer possible.

13...♕d8

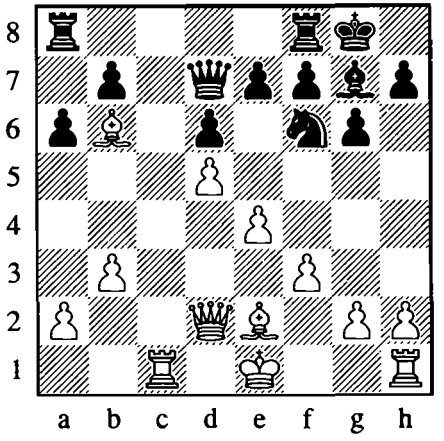
Tiviakov probably realized his mistake by now, as keeping the queens on the board gives more practical chances to Black.

If 13...♕xd2† 14.♔xd2 ♗xd5 (or 14...♖ae8 15.♗e2 ♘d7 16.h4±) 15.cxd5± we are back to the highly undesirable endgame from the previous example.

14.♗b6 ♕d7 15.♗e2 ♗xd5

A necessary concession. If instead 15...♖ac8 16.0–0± and Black has nothing useful to do other than capture on d5 after all.

16.cxd5±



We essentially have the previous game again, but now in the presence of queens.

16...♖fc8 17.0–0 ♕e8

The break 17...e6?! 18.dxe6 fxe6 works poorly as the presence of queens makes Black's king vulnerable.

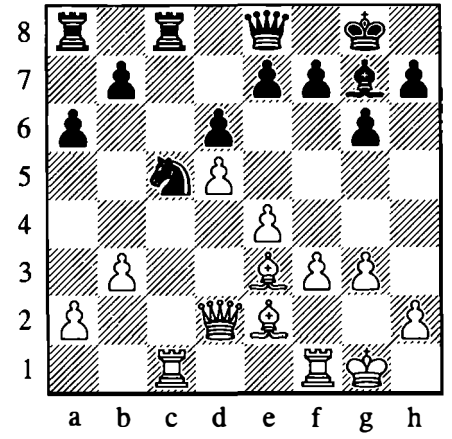
18.♗e3 ♘d7 19.g3

The careless 19.b4 ♕d8 20.a4?! is met by 20...a5! 21.bxa5 ♘c5 with counterplay for Black.

19...♘c5?

Blocking the c-file for the moment, but this will not work in the long run as White is able to play b3-b4.

Better was 19...♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♖c8 21.♖c2 ♕d8 22.♔g2 h5 23.b4 ♔h7 24.♕c1 ♖xc2 25.♕xc2 ♗h6 26.♗f2! keeping the pair of bishops. After 26...a5 27.a3 axb4 28.axb4± White is certainly better, though Black remains solid.



20.♖c2 a5 21.♖fc1 b6

The problem with Black's 19th move is that the c-file will not stay blocked forever. Meanwhile, Black's attempts to keep the file blocked are creating weaknesses that will persist forever. For example ...b7-b6 makes the b6-pawn and the c6-square weak.

22.♕d1 ♕f8 23.a3!±

Preparing b3-b4.

23...♖cb8

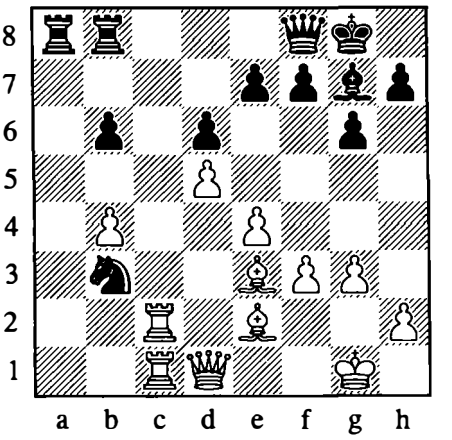
But not: 23...♘xb3? 24.♖xc8 ♖xc8 25.♖xc8 ♕xc8 26.♕xb3+–

24.b4 axb4 25.axb4 ♘b3?

The decisive mistake; the knight will not find away out.

More stubborn was 25...♘d7 26.♗b5 ♕d8 27.♕e2 ♖a7 though White has many risk-free plans to play for a win, such as 28.♗c6!? h5 29.♔g2 ♔h7 30.♖a2 ♖xa2 31.♕xa2± following by an a-file invasion.

Not 25...♖a3? 26.bxc5 ♖xe3 27.c6 followed by c6-c7 and ♗a6 winning.



26.♖b1 ♖a3 27.♖c6 ♘a1 28.♗xb6

White is completely winning due to his extra pawn and the awkward location of the knight on a1. The rest of the game needs no comments.

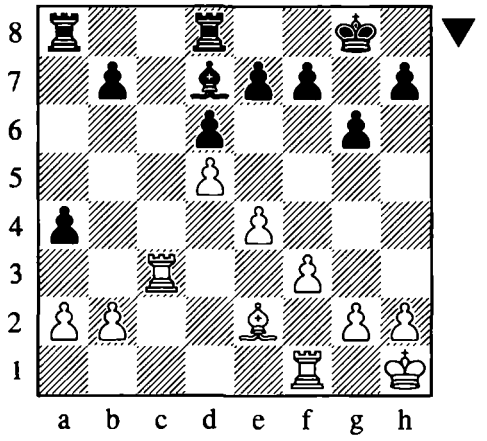
28...f5 29.♗d4 ♖ba8 30.e5 ♗xe5 31.♗xe5 dxe5 32.b5 e4 33.b6 exf3 34.♗xf3 ♕h6 35.b7 ♕e3† 36.♔h1 ♔f7 37.bxa8=♕ ♖xa8 38.d6 1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's problems began by forgetting his opening move order, and allowing the strong 13.♘d5, which is an improved version of the previous game, as the ...♕xa2 reply is no longer available.
2. Despite his opening imprecision, Black had reasonable chances to hold the game by trading rooks on move 19.
3. Black's biggest mistake was attempting to block the c-file with 19...♘c5, as White will gain this file anyway after the standard b3-b4. Black's problem was that supporting his knight on c5 meant creating more weaknesses with 20...a5 and 21...b6, hence later when the c-file was finally unblocked, White gained a huge advantage.

Another Endgame

Jakovljevic – Predojevic, Novi Sad 2012, started out as a Maroczy and reached the position in the diagram, which is similar to previous examples.



Despite not having a pair of bishops, White has a significant spatial advantage and a very promising position. The game continued:

20...♔f8 21.♖fc1 ♔e8 22.♔g1 ♖dc8 23.♔f2

If 23.♖xc8†!? ♗xc8 24.♔f2 ♔d8 25.♔e3 ♖a5 26.♔d4 Black is worse but his position seems defensible after 26...♗d7.

23...♔d8 24.♔e3 b6

Hoping to install a blockade with ...♖c5.

An option was 24...♖xc3† 25.♖xc3 e5! to be followed by ...f7-f5, and after 26.dxe6 fxe6 27.f4 ♖a5!? the d6- and e6-pawns are not as vulnerable, and White's king cannot manoeuvre as easily, hence Black should be able to hold a draw with precise play.

25.♖xc8†!

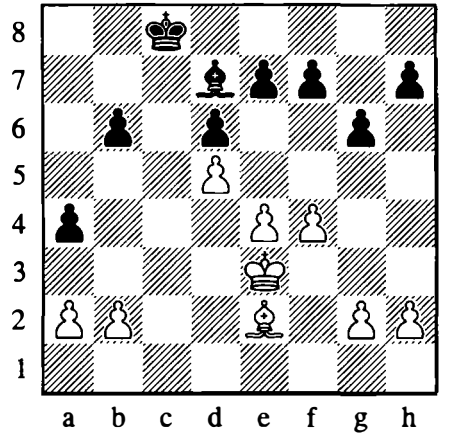
Trading rooks will help White here, as the bishop endgame is difficult and Black's lack of space can eventually lead to a zugzwang.

25...♖xc8?

Without rooks on the board, Black loses all his chances for counterplay.

Better was 25...♗xc8 26.♖c6 ♖b8 27.f4 ♗d7 28.♖c1 ♖a8 29.g4 ♖a5 30.g5 f5!? when White remains better, but the most likely result is draw.

26.♖xc8† ♔xc8 27.f4



27...♔c7?

This careless move is the decisive mistake.

If 27...e6 28.dxe6 fxe6 29.♔d4 the absence of rooks allows White to manoeuvre freely, giving him excellent winning chances after: 29...♗c6 30.h4 ♔d8 31.g4 ♔e7 32.g5±

Necessary was 27...f6! to prevent White from placing a pawn on g5; 28.h4 (or 28.g4 g5!) 28...h6 29.g4?! (instead 29.♔d4 ♔c7 30.e5! is more promising) 29...g5! 30.fxg5 fxg5 31.hxg5 hxg5 And now at least the g4-pawn is fixed on its own bishop's colour. White still has a promising position after 32.e5! dxe5 33.♔e4± but Black keeps drawing chances, say after 33...♚d8 34.♔xe5 ♔e8 35.a3 ♔f7.

28.g4 h6

Keeping the kingside intact makes no difference. For example: 28...b5 29.♔d4 ♔b6 30.a3 ♔a5 31.♔c3 The queenside is paralyzed; now White proceeds on the kingside. 31...♗c8 32.h4 ♗d7 33.g5 ♗h3 34.h5! ♗g2 35.hxg6 hxg6 36.♗d3+– Followed by ♔d4, f4-f5xg6 and we reach the same structure as in the game.

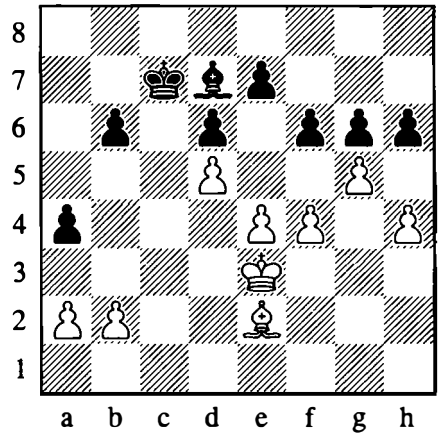
29.h4 f6

If Black wants to refrain from ...f7-f6, to

keep the g6-pawn defended, then a possible continuation is: 29...b5 30.♔d4 ♔b6 31.a3 ♗e8 32.g5 hxg5 33.hxg5 ♗d7 34.f5! gxf5 (or 34...♗e8 35.fxg6 fxg6 36.e5! is similar to the game) 35.♗h5 And White wins after ♗xf7.

30.g5!

Just as in Polugaevsky – Ivkov, White expands on the kingside to create weaknesses in Black's camp. Black is helpless as he will be unable to protect the g6-pawn.



30...fxg5 31.fxg5 hxg5

Or 31...h5 32.♔d4 e5† (or 32...b5 33.e5 is similar to the game) 33.dxe6 ♗xe6 34.♗b5! (threatening ♗e8) 34...♔d8 35.a3 ♗b3 36.♗c4! forcing a winning pawn endgame after 36...♗xc4 37.♔xc4 ♔e7 38.♔b5.

32.hxg5 b5 33.♔d4 ♔b6

Keeping the king centralized does not help either: 33...♗e8 34.a3 ♔b6 35.♗d3 ♔c7 36.e5 dxe5† 37.♔xe5 ♔d8 38.♔e6!+– Black is in zugzwang.

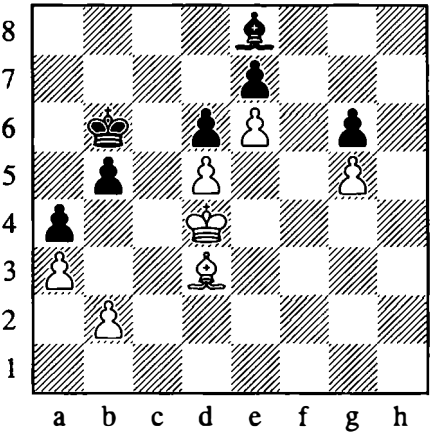
34.♗d3 ♔a5 35.a3

Fixing Black's pawns on light squares.

35...♔b6

35...b4 does not help: 36.e5 ♗e8 37.e6 Black is in zugzwang, thus he must take on a3: 37...bxa3 38.bxa3 ♔b6 And now White must lose a tempo, hence he plays: 39.♗e4 (39.♔c3? ♔c5) 39...♔a5 40.♗f3 ♔b5 41.♗e2† ♔b6 42.♗d3! Now Black is in a new zugzwang: 42...♔a5 43.♔c3 ♔b6 44.♔b4 ♔c7 45.♔a5 ♔b7 46.♗b5! The resulting pawn endgame is winning.

36.e5 ♗e8 37.e6



Black is completely lost, and the game finished with the nice sequence:

37...♔a5 38.♔c3 ♔a6 39.♔b4 ♔b6 40.♗c2 ♔a6 41.b3 axb3 42.♗xb3 ♔b6 43.♗c2 ♔a6 44.♗d3 ♔b6 45.♗e2

Zugzwang. 45...♔a6 46.a4 ♔b6 47.♗xb5

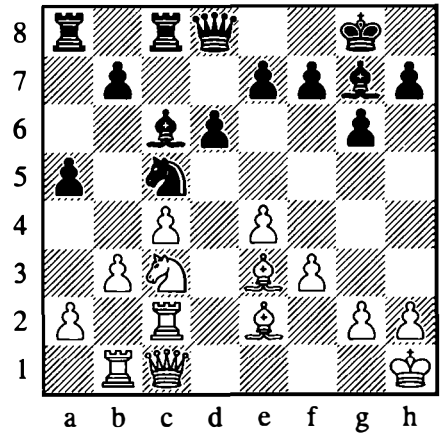
1–0

Final remarks

1. Once again, White's spatial advantage allows him to gain even more space.
2. Unlike previous examples, White did not have a pair of bishops here, but still managed to make problems for Black.
3. Black's position was defensible, say with 24...♖xc3 followed by ...e5. Nevertheless, almost every line required precision from Black, while White could play for a win risk-free.
4. Something to mention from the initial position is Black's pawn on a4, which is the same colour as his bishop. If this pawn had been on a5 to begin with then Black would have had better chances to hold the game, at least in the bishop endgame.

Counterplay for Black

Although Black is often worse after the symmetric transformation, there exist ways to create counterplay, and here is an example.



After a standard opening, we have reached the position in the diagram, and we obtain the structure of interest after:

20.♘d5 ♗xd5 21.cxd5

Now the game **Navara – Jirovsky**, Czech Republic 2003, continued with:

21...a4!

Black has a trick in mind.

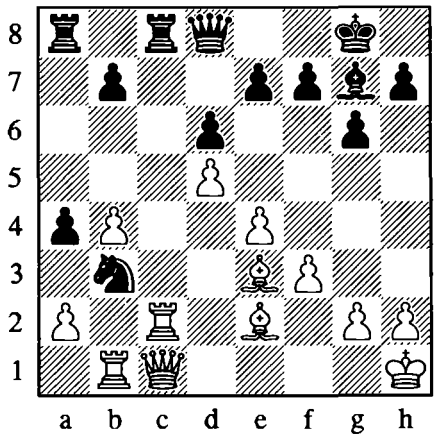
22.b4?!

Overly optimistic, though it is hard to blame White for overlooking Black's reply.

Better was: 22.bxa4 ♖xa4 23.♗b5 (or 23.♖xb7!? ♖xa2! 24.♖xa2 ♘xb7 25.♖c2 when White has a tiny plus) 23...♖aa8 24.a4 ♘d7 25.♗f1 ♖xc2 26.♕xc2 ♖c8 27.♕d2 ♖c7 White is still somewhat better, but now Black certainly can find more counterplay than in the previous examples.

22...♘b3!

A strong recurring idea in this position – the knight is immune.



23.axb3

Black takes the initiative after 23.♕d1?! ♖xc2 24.♕xc2 ♘d4 25.♕d3 ♘xe2 26.♕xe2 ♖c8.

An option was 23.♖xc8 ♕xc8! 24.♕xc8† (but not 24.axb3 a3!–+) 24...♖xc8 and now Black is fine after 25.♗b5 (again not 25.axb3? a3–+) 25...♖c3 26.♗xa4 ♖xe3 27.♗xb3 ♗c3!? with a drawish position.

23...a3 24.♖c4?

Necessary was 24.♗c4 a2 25.♖a1 ♗xa1 26.♕xa1 though after 26...b5! the bishop is lost: 27.♖xa2 (White is losing after 27.♗d3? ♖xc2 28.♗xc2 ♕c8! and now for example 29.♗d3 ♖a3 30.♗g1 ♖xb3 31.♗xb5 ♕c2) 27...♖xa2 28.♕xa2 bxc4 29.bxc4 ♖a8 30.♕b2 ♖a4 And we obtain a dynamically balanced position where either side could play for the win.

24...a2 25.♖a1 ♖xc4 26.♗xc4

The alternative 26.bxc4? loses after the forced line: 26...♕f8 27.♕d1 ♗xa1 28.♕xa1 ♕g7 29.♕xg7† ♔xg7 30.♗d4† ♔f8 31.♗a1 ♖a4

26...♕f8 27.♕d1 ♗xa1 28.♕xa1

And now Black had two alternatives:

28...♕g7!

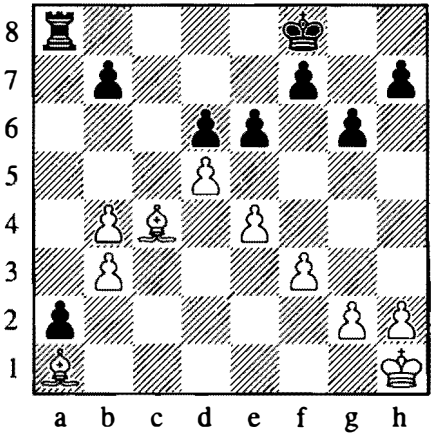
Or 28...f5!? as played in the game, and after 29.♗d4 fxe4 30.fxe4 ♕f4 31.♗h8? (instead 31.♕e1! keeps the game complicated) 31...♔f7 32.♗c3 ♕xe4 **Black won** very easily.

29.♕xg7† ♔xg7 30.♗d4† ♔f8 31.♗a1

And we reach an interesting endgame where White's pieces are more or less tied down, but it is hard to break through the defence. An attempt to win could be:

31...e6!?

Opening lines.



32.♔g1

But not 32.dxe6? fxe6 33.♗xe6 ♖e8 34.♗c4 due to 34...d5!–+ and the back rank is defenceless after 35.♗xd5 (35.exd5? ♖e1†) 35...♖c8 36.♗c4 b5.

32...exd5 33.exd5 ♖e8 34.♔f2 f5

Now Black will expand while White attempts to keep his fortress intact.

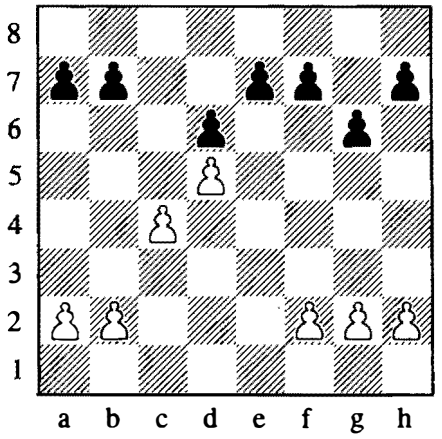
35.♗b2 ♔f7 36.♗a1 g5 37.♗b2 f4 38.♗a1 ♖e3 39.b5

But not: 39.♗b2? b5! 40.♗xb5 ♖xb3 41.♗a1 ♖b1–+

39...b6 40.♗d4 ♔g6 41.♗a1 h5 42.♗b2 ♔f5∓

Black has a big advantage, but it is not completely clear whether he can break through White's defence.

Asymmetric Transformation



Once the knight on d5 is captured, White can also recapture exd5 to obtain a very different kind of position, which we call the asymmetric transformation of the Maroczy. Unlike the symmetric transformation, the recapture exd5 is much more tactical and double-edged. White typically attempts a mating attack while Black will gain counterplay on the queenside. Black has a backward pawn on e7 which could become a target for White's rooks. However, Black can often neutralize this pressure by simply placing his dark-squared bishop on f6.

White's plans

1. Create a kingside attack with the break f2-f4-f5.
2. Pressure the e7-pawn by doubling rooks on the e-file. This is only likely to work if Black cannot place a bishop on f6.

Black's plans

1. Attack White's c4-d5 chain with the break ...b7-b5xc4.
2. Open the a-file with ...a7-a5-a4xb3. If White responds to ...a5-a4 with b3-b4, then the c4-d5 chain becomes weaker, and the break ...b7-b5 could be stronger.
3. Simplify the position to minimize White's attacking chances.

White's kingside attack is very effective if Black cannot create the appropriate distraction with queenside play. For this reason, it is a *must* for Black to have at least one queenside break at hand. In contrast, if Black realizes he will not be able to find a queenside break, then he should probably avoid this structure altogether, or find a way to swap queens before an attack develops.

If Black desires to press for a win, the best approach is to combine Plans 1-3 (or 2-3), when trading queens is most important. Once Black has played ...b7-b5xc4, and White recaptures b3xc4, then the c4-pawn becomes a serious long-term target. This weakness is often more serious than Black's e7-pawn which is easily defended by a bishop on f6 or a king on f8.

The next example will show us the power of White's kingside attack once Black has missed the opportunity to achieve a queenside break. Then, we will see a short fragment to illustrate the ease of Black's play in an endgame, once the c4-pawn has been weakened.

Nikolai Ninov – Dragoljub Velimirovic

Belgrade 2009

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates White's attacking chances after an asymmetric transformation.
2. Note Black's inability to create counterplay once the queenside is closed.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4 ♗g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 d6 8.♗e2 0–0 9.0–0 ♗d7 10.♕d2 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 ♗c6 12.f3 a5 13.b3 ♘d7 14.♗e3 ♘c5 15.♖ab1

So far we are in the main line of the Accelerated Dragon, and now:

15...b6

This is a rare and low-scoring option. The main line is 15...♕b6.

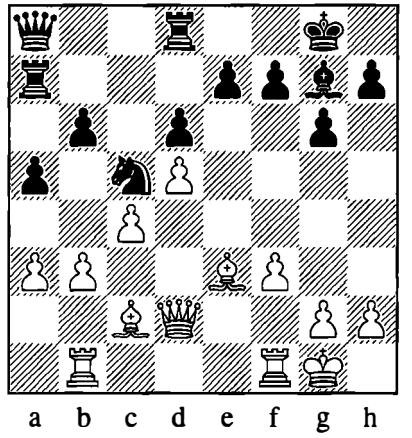
16.♗d1 ♖a7 17.a3 ♕a8 18.♗c2 ♖d8 19.♘d5

White's position is notably comfortable and now he invites Black to transform his position after:

19...♗xd5 20.exd5!

We have reached the thematic structure.

If 20.cxd5 ♖c8 21.♖fc1 ♖ac7 22.♗d1 b5 Black seems fine as he has gained some queenside space without weakening his position.



20...♘d7

If 20...a4 21.b4 ♘d7 22.♗d3 ♖c7 23.♖fd1± White has a stable advantage, since the break 23...b5 is met by 24.♖bc1 bxc4 25.♖xc4 ♖xc4 26.♗xc4± and the d5-pawn is well protected while Black's a4-pawn is a target.

21.f4

This thematic move prepares f4-f5 with an attack, but it enables counterplay.

Better was 21.a4! preventing ...a5-a4, leaving Black without queenside activity.

21...♕c8?

Returning the favour; Black misses his opportunity to complicate the game.

The break 21...a4! was necessary to obtain counterplay, and after 22.bxa4 (22.b4?! is met

by 22..♖c7 23.♕e2 ♖dc8 24.♗d3 b5!= when White's centre is trembling) 22...♖c8 23.♖b4 ♖ac7 24.♗d3 ♘c5 White's extra pawn is clearly worthless. Still, there are chances for a kingside attack after 25.f5!? ♘xa4 26.fxg6 hxg6 27.♕f2.

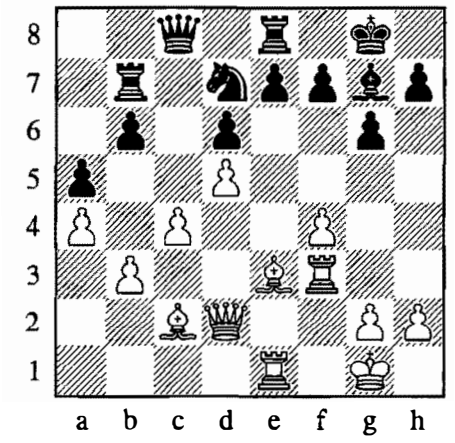
22.a4!±

This move rules out Black's queenside reactions ...a5-a4 and ...b6-b5, and so White obtains a fully stable queenside. White is now able to conduct his kingside attack without distractions.

Instead 22.f5? allows counterplay after 22...a4!.

22...♖b7 23.♖bc1 ♖e8 24.♖f3

The immediate 24.f5 gives Black fewer options, and after 24...♘e5 25.♖f4 ♗f6 (or 25...♗h6 26.♖h4 ♗xe3† 27.♖xe3 followed by ♖eh3) 26.h4 ♔g7 27.♕f2± White can follow up with g2-g4 with deadly threats.



24...e5

Preventing f4-f5 with:

24...f5!?

Can be met by:

25.g4!

Forcing the opening of lines.

25...fxg4

Worse is 25...♖f8? 26.gxf5 gxf5 27.♕g2 ♔h8 28.♖g3 when White's attack is irresistible.

26.♖f2

Preparing f4-f5.

26...♗f6

26...♘f6 27.f5! gxf5 28.♗xf5 ♕d8 29.♖g2 ♔h8 30.♗d4+–

27.♖ef1 ♘c5 28.f5!

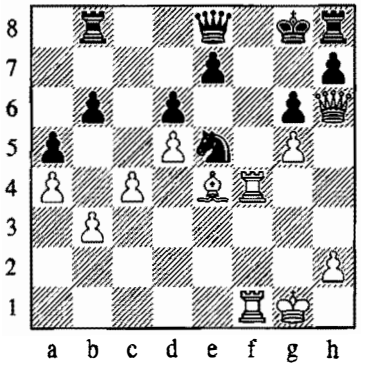
Keeping the e7-pawn fixed.

28.♖g2? e6!

28...g5 29.♗xg5 h5 30.h3!±

When Black is unable to keep the kingside closed.

Waiting with 24...♕d8 allows a strong attack after 25.f5! ♘e5 26.♖g3 ♗f6 27.♖f1. Note how Black can only wait to be defeated: 27...♔g7 28.♖h3 ♖h8 29.♗h6† ♔g8 30.♕e2 ♖b8 31.g4 ♖c8 32.♕e4 ♖c7 33.g5 ♗g7 34.♗xg7 ♔xg7 35.♕h4! Black's position is hopeless: 35...♔g8 36.fxg6 fxg6 37.♖e3 Bringing the rook to the f-file. 37...♖b7 38.♖e4 ♖b8 39.♖ef4 ♕d7 40.♕h6 Black is tied to the defence of f8. 40...♕e8 41.♗e4!



This will be followed by ♗g2-h3-e6 – a very nice finish.

25.dxe6 ♖xe6 26.f5!

The attack continues.

26...♖e8 27.♖ef1 ♘e5 28.♖g3 ♕c6 29.f6

An alternative was 29.♗d4 d5 30.♕f4 threatening f5-f6: 30...♕f6 31.♔h1 (but not 31.fxg6? ♘f3†!) 31...dxc4 32.fxg6 ♕xf4 33.gxh7† ♔h8 34.♖xf4±

29...♗h8 30.♕d4

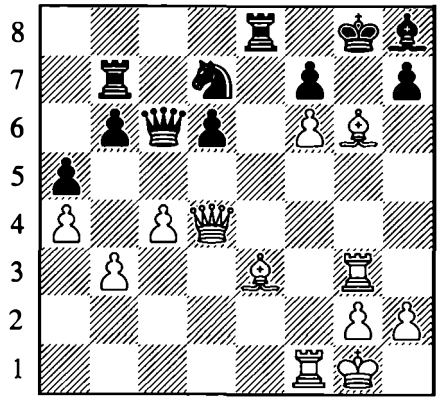
Threatening ♗e4 or ♕h4 and then ♖h3.

30...♘d7?

The final mistake.

More stubborn was 30...d5! 31.♕xd5 ♕xd5 32.cxd5± though White has a clear extra pawn.

31.♗xg6!+–



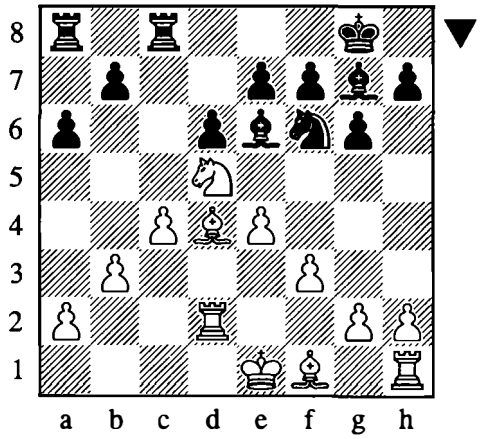
Black resigns, as the following lines offer no escape: 31...hxg6 (or 31...fxg6 32.f7† ♔f8 33.♕xh8† ♔e7 34.fxe8=♕#) 32.♖xg6†! And checkmate is unavoidable. For example: 32...♔h7 (32...fxg6 33.f7†) 33.♕h4† ♔xg6 34.♕h6#

1–0

Final remarks

1. The reader should note how in this game the capture 20.cxd5 would *not* have given much to White. It is necessary to know the pros and cons of both structures in order to choose correctly.
2. Once White stabilized the queenside with a3-a4, he had a free hand for a kingside attack. It is unlikely that Black could resist successfully.

Black obtains a superior endgame



The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Aziz – Vazquez Igarza**, Madrid 2011. White's opening phase was rather imprecise, and at this point Black is ready to play:

15...♗xd5! 16.exd5

Worse is: 16.cxd5?! ♖c1† 17.♔f2 ♖ac8∓

16...♘d7!

Black finds a good opportunity to trade off White's pair of bishops. For the rest of the game White will be weak on the dark squares.

17.♗xg7

Unfortunately 17.♗e3? loses an exchange to 17...♗c3.

17...♔xg7 18.♗e2

Slightly preferable was:

18.♔f2

But now Black finds counterplay with:

18...a5!

While 18...b5? 19.cxb5± no longer works for Black.

19.♗d3

Or 19.a4 ♘c5 20.♖b2 ♖a6! followed by ...♖b6

19...a4 20.b4

20.♖e1 axb3 21.axb3 ♔f8 22.♗b1 ♖a3∓

20...♖c7 21.♖e1 ♔f8 22.f4 ♖ac8

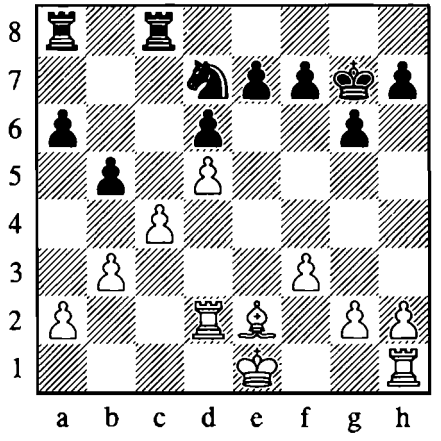
Note how the c4-pawn is weaker than Black's e7-pawn.

23.♖c2 b5! 24.♖ec1 bxc4 25.♗xc4 ♘b6 26.♗d3 ♖xc2† 27.♖xc2 ♖xc2† 28.♗xc2 ♘xd5 29.b5 ♘b6∓

Here only Black can play for a win.

18...b5!

Black achieves the thematic break for this structure.



19.♔f2

The capture 19.cxb5? is met by 19...♖c1† 20.♖d1 (or 20.♗d1 axb5∓) 20...♖xd1† 21.♔xd1 axb5 22.♗xb5 ♖xa2!∓ when White has weaknesses everywhere, and of course 23.♗xd7? loses to 23...♖a1† 24.♔c2 ♖xh1.

19...bxc4 20.bxc4?

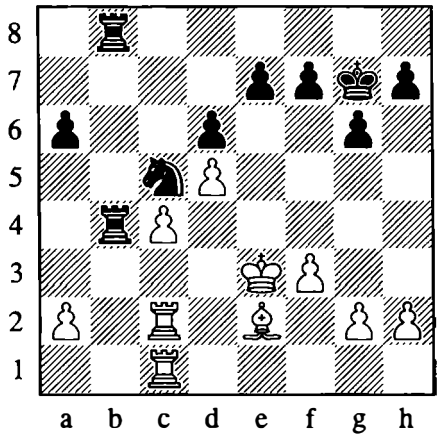
Now the c4-pawn will be a permanent weakness.

It was necessary to play 20.♗xc4 ♘b6 21.♗e2 ♖c5 22.♖hd1 a5∓ though Black is in control.

20...♖ab8

Black controls the b-file and has a clear target in the c4-pawn; White has no counterplay whatsoever.

21.♖c1 ♖b4 22.♖dc2 ♖cb8 23.♔e3 ♘c5∓



Black has complete control of the dark squares and White's light-squared bishop is actually quite useless. Black can progress slowly but surely.

24.♖c3 ♔f6 25.♖3c2 ♖a4 26.♖d1 ♖a3† 27.♔d2 h5

Expansion on the kingside!

28.h4 ♔e5 29.♔e1 ♘a4 30.♔f2

30.♖dd2 does not help: ♖b1† 31.♔f2 ♖a1 32.g3 a5 33.♔g2 ♔f6 34.♔f2 ♘c5 35.♔g2 ♘a6 36.♔f2 ♘b4 Black wins as the a2-pawn is lost after all.

30...♖b2! 31.♖xb2 ♘xb2 32.♖d2 ♖xa2

Black has a clear extra pawn and won convincingly.

Final remarks

1. The reader should understand that this version of the asymmetric transformation was very bad for White from the start. The queens were off the board, White was forced to trade his dark-squared bishop, and most importantly, he could not prevent Black from breaking on the queenside.
2. Once Black captured ...bxc4, White's recapture bxc4 was like accepting the loss, as Black obtained a dominant position and White found himself without a plan. At that point there was basically nothing to do other than wait.

Milos Pavlovic – Manuel Leon Hoyos

USA 2012

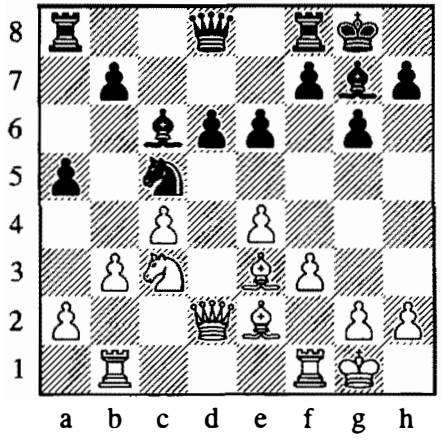
Learning objective: This game shows how Black may obtain counterplay with the ...f7-f5 break.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 d6 7.♗e2 ♗g7 8.♗e3 0–0 9.0–0 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗d7 11.♕d2 ♗c6 12.f3 a5 13.b3 ♘d7 14.♗e3 ♘c5 15.♖ab1

So far everything is familiar, and now:

15...e6!?

This is an interesting option and one of the main lines in this variation (the popular main line is 15...♕b6). Black is setting up a future ...f7-f5 break.



16.♖fc1?!

The move ♖fc1 is often utilized in this opening to support a queenside expansion and fight against Black's queen (which is typically on b6 or b4). But since Black is trying for a different plan with ...f7-f5, this move is not as useful here.

More common and logical is 16.♖fd1 ♗e5 but notice that after 17.♗d4 ♕e7 (but not 17...♗xd4†?! 18.♕xd4±) 18.♗xe5?! dxe5 the doubled pawns are no problem, as Black will play ...f7-f5 with good counterplay.

16...♗e5 17.♗f1

17.f4? loses a pawn to 17...♗xc3 18.♕xc3 ♘xe4.

17...♕e7

A cautious move, preparing ...f7-f5 for when the right moment comes.

17...f5 18.exf5 ♖xf5

This option seems a little premature after:

19.f4!

The tiny slip 19.♗d4? is losing after: 19...♕g5! 20.♗e3 (or 20.♕xg5? ♗xd4† or 20.♖d1 ♗xd4† 21.♕xd4 ♖xf3) 20...♕h4 21.g3 ♗xg3!

19...♗g7 20.♖e1

White is a little more comfortable due to the vulnerable d6- and e6-pawns. Nevertheless the position is roughly equal.

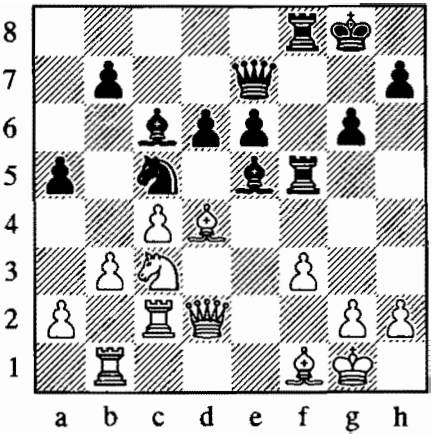
18.♖c2 f5!

A timely reaction; this break opens lines and will allow Black to find good counterplay.

19.exf5 ♖xf5 20.♗d4

Now the desirable 20.f4? loses an exchange after 20...♗xc3! and now 21.♕xc3 ♗e4 or 21.♖xc3 ♘e4.

20...♖af8



Black has obtained a threatening position; note how all his pieces contribute to the attack.

21.♘e2?

A careless move, and the decisive mistake.

Correct was 21.♖d1! as 21...♗xh2†? 22.♔xh2 ♕h4† 23.♔g1 ♖h5 no longer works due to 24.♗e2! when the f3-pawn is protected and the king escapes.

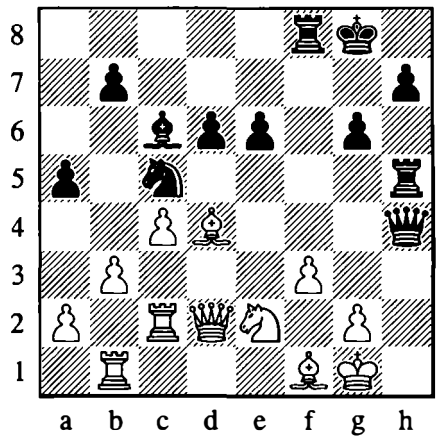
But instead, against 21.♖d1 Black replies: 21...♗f4!? (or 21...♖g5) 22.♕e1 ♖h5 23.g3 ♗e5 (or 23...♗xf3!? 24.gxf4 ♖xf4 with compensation) 24.f4 ♗xd4† 25.♖xd4 e5 followed by ...♘e6 with counterplay.

21.♗xe5?! is risky for White, as the following forcing line shows: 21...dxe5 22.♕e3 e4! 23.fxe4 ♘xe4 24.♘xe4 ♗xe4 25.♗d3 ♗xd3 26.♕xd3 ♕c5† 27.♔h1 ♕d6! 28.♕e2 (28.♕xd6?? ♖f1† 29.♖xf1 ♖xf1#) 28...e5 29.h3 e4!? The position is balanced, though a little easier for Black.

21...♗xh2†!–+

The game was just getting started... This blow really makes a point by showing us how effective is Black's ...f7-f5 in the creation of kingside threats.

22.♔xh2 ♖h5† 23.♔g1 ♕h4



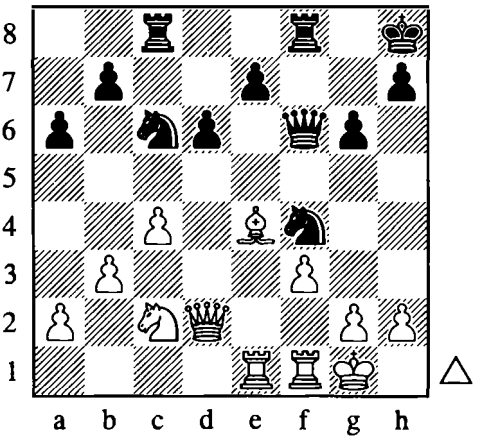
White resigns as there is no satisfactory defence against the threats of 24...♖xf3 or 24...♘e4, followed by 25...♕h2#.

0–1

Final remarks

1. White's post-opening play was imprecise; it was clear that Black was planning ...f7-f5 hence 16.♖fc1 was out of place.
2. The key to Black's 17...♕e7 is to prepare ...f7-f5 so that it is not so easy for White to play f3-f4 driving away the bishop on e5, as we see in the variation 15...f5. If White cannot play f3-f4 after the trade on f5, then Black is likely to have at least enough counterplay.

White dominates after f3-f4



To complete what was mentioned about White playing f3-f4, take the position in the diagram, which occurred in **Simacek – Kanovsky**, Czech Republic 2010. Black played ...f7-f5 a few moves earlier, but could not develop his initiative quite so effectively, and now after:

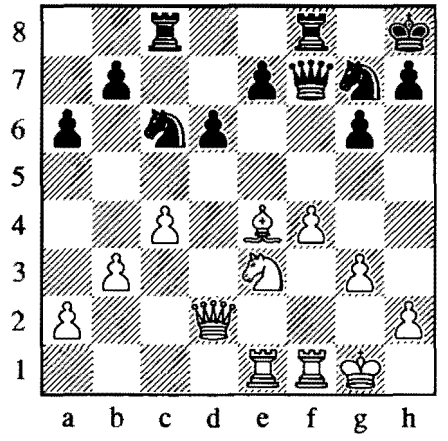
25.g3! ♘h5 26.f4±

White controls the board, as Black can do nothing on the kingside, while his central pawns are clear targets for White. A big difference between this position and the previous game is Black's lack of bishops, hence his inability to create many threats. The game continued:

26...♘g7 27.♘e3 ♕f7

Better was 27...♘f5 though after: 28.♗xc6 bxc6 29.♘xf5 gxf5 30.♖e3 e5 (or 30...♖fe8

31.♖fe1 ♕f7 32.♖e6±) 31.♖d3! ♖cd8 32.fxe5 ♕xe5 (or 32...dxe5 33.♖xd8 ♖xd8 34.♖xf5! ♖xd2 35.♖xf6±) 33.♖e3± Black's pawn structure is very weak.



28.f5!+–

It is White who attacks now, but of course this attack is based on the strong foundation of a superior pawn structure without weaknesses like the e7-pawn.

28...gxf5

28...g5 doesn't help: 29.♘d5 h6 30.f6! exf6 31.♖xf6+–

And now the best continuation was:

29.♘xf5!

Instead the game continued 29.♗xf5 ♘xf5 30.♘xf5± and **White won** convincingly.

29...♘xf5 30.♖xf5 ♕g8 31.♖h5 ♖f7 32.♗d5

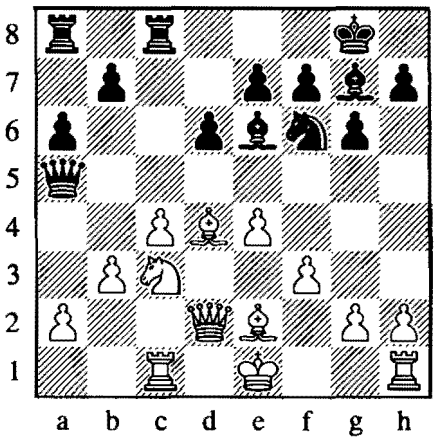
Winning an exchange and the game.

Wang Zili – Zhang Pengxiang

Yongchuan 2003

Learning objective: This game illustrates Black's ...b7-b5 break. Note that after pawns are traded on b5, the a2-pawn becomes a serious target.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4 ♗g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0–0 8.♗e2 d6 9.♖c1 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e6 11.♕d2 ♕a5 12.f3 ♖fc8 13.b3 a6



14.0–0?!

A serious opening imprecision, allowing Black to seize the initiative.

The main line is 14.♗e3, though after 14...b5 15.♘d5 ♕xd2† 16.♔xd2 ♘xd5 17.cxd5 ♗d7 Black has a satisfactory version of the symmetric transformation, since White cannot easily gain space on the queenside and both rooks are likely to come off the board. For example, after 18.♖xc8† ♖xc8 19.♖c1 ♖xc1 20.♔xc1 e6!? which seems fairly drawish.

14...b5 15.cxb5

An interesting resource was 15.♗e3!? bxc4 16.bxc4 ♖ab8 (but not 16...♗xc4? due to 17.♘d5! ♕xd2 18.♘xe7† ♔f8 19.♗xd2 ♔xe7 20.♖xc4±) and now 17.♘d5 ♕xd2 18.♗xd2 ♘xd5 19.cxd5 leads to a roughly equal position.

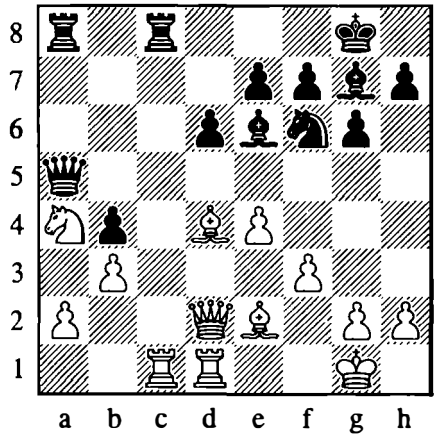
15...axb5

Now White is facing a positional problem. He no longer has a spatial advantage and in fact his a2-pawn is a backward pawn, a potential target; Black's position is preferable.

16.♖fd1

An option was 16.♕e3 ♗d7 17.f4 b4 18.♘a4! ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♖c8 (but not 19...♗xa4? 20.♗b6 when the queen is trapped) 20.♖xc8† ♗xc8 21.e5 ♘d5 22.♕d2 dxe5 23.fxe5 e6∓ when Black is better, though White has managed to draw attention away from the weak a2-pawn.

16...b4 17.♘a4



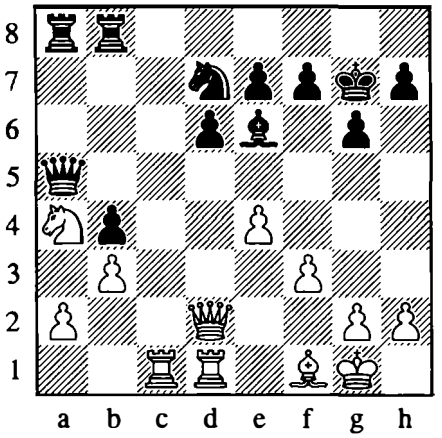
17...♖cb8

More precise was 17...♘d7 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♕d4† ♔g8 20.♕e3 when Black is just a little better, but the position is delicate. For example, the premature 20...♘c5?! (better is 20...♖ab8!?) 21.♘xc5 ♖xc5 22.♖xc5 dxc5 23.♖d2 allows White to equalize.

18.♗f1

Better was 18.♗c4! as after 18...♗d7 19.♕e2 ♗xa4 20.bxa4 ♕xa4 21.♗b3 White finds compensation for the pawn. For example, 21...♕a5 22.e5 dxe5 23.♖c5 ♕a6 24.♕xa6 ♖xa6 25.♗xe5 ♖ba8 26.♖b5 regaining the pawn.

18...♘d7 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7



20.♕e1?

This unnecessarily blunders a pawn. Better was: 20.♗c4 ♗xc4 21.♖xc4 ♘e5 22.♖cc1 ♖c8∓

20...♘b6! 21.♘xb6 ♕xb6† 22.♔h1 ♖xa2

Black is a pawn up and won the game without problems.

Final remarks

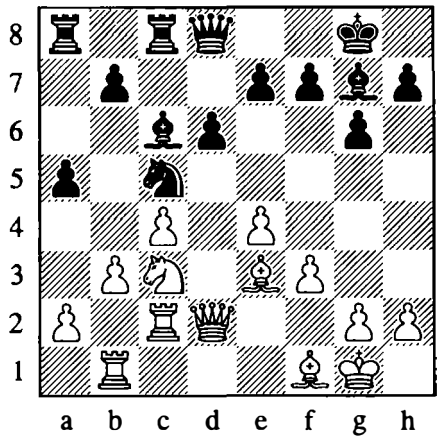
Something that bothers me about this example (and essentially every example I found with ...b7-b5) is how White was still able to hold the position and even make a draw in some variations despite having allowed ...b7-b5-b4. The truth is, this plan is often good enough to gain a tiny advantage, but the game can become oversimplified rather easily. Nevertheless, we should remember the Maroczy structure often gives better chances to White. If White has to play precisely in order to make a draw, then we could say Black's strategy has succeeded.

Davorin Kuljasevic – Boris Golubovic

Bol na Bracu 2013

Learning objective: This game shows how White can break in the centre with e4-e5 to weaken Black's camp.

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.e4 ♗g7 6.♗e3 d6 7.♘c3 ♘f6 8.f3 ♘xd4 9.♗xd4 0–0 10.♗e2 ♗d7 11.0–0 a5 12.b3 ♗c6 13.♕d2 ♘d7 14.♗e3 ♘c5 15.♖ab1 ♕b6 16.♖fc1 ♖fc8 17.♖c2 ♕d8 18.♗f1



Everything is theory so far, in fact there are over two hundred games on my database with this exact position, and now Black deviates from the main line with:

18...♗e5

The main line goes 18...h5.

19.g3 h5 20.♗g2

White is preparing to play f3-f4 gaining space.

20...♔h7 21.♖e1 ♕f8?!

More cautious is 21...b6 22.♗f2 (but not 22.♘d5?! e6! 23.♘c3 h4 when Black begins to create kingside play) 22...♗g7 23.f4± though White is a little better and may speculate with either e4-e5 or f4-f5.

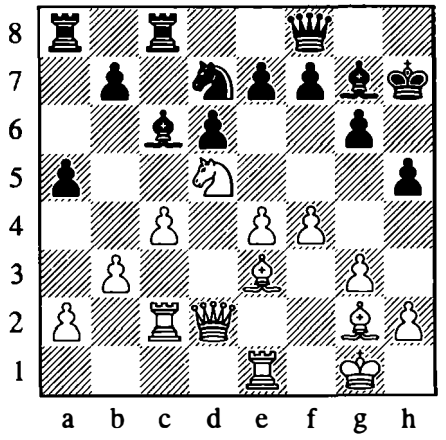
22.♘d5!

Good timing, threatening 23.♘b6.

22...♘d7

If 22...♗xd5, although 23.exd5?! ♕g7 24.f4 ♗f6 is nothing special for White, say after 25.f5 g5! keeping the kingside closed, White has a pleasant choice between 23.♕xd5 e6 24.♕d2 ♗g7 25.f4± or 23.cxd5 ♕d8 24.♖ec1± to follow up with ♕d1, a2-a3 and b3-b4. This is similar to the earlier example Smeets – Tiviakov.

23.f4 ♗g7



24.♔h1?!

Too slow.

Better was the direct 24.f5! and now a possible continuation is: 24...e6 25.fxg6† (or 25.♗f4!?±) 25...fxg6 26.♖f1 ♕e8 27.♗g5! (threatening ♘e7 or ♘f6) 27...exd5 28.exd5 ♗a4! 29.bxa4 ♘e5 30.♕e2 ♕xa4 31.♗e4± When Black's kingside is seriously weakened.

24...♕d8?!

This imprecision returns the favour.

If 24...e6 White preserves an advantage after: 25.♘b6 (or 25.♖d1!? exd5 26.exd5 ♗a4 27.bxa4±) 25...♘xb6 26.♗xb6 a4 27.b4±

25.♘c3?!

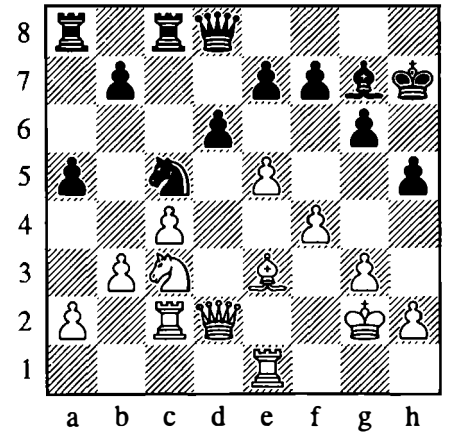
Too slow again! White preserves an advantage, but misses a stronger option.

Now 25.f5! was even more promising. For example: 25...♗xd5 (25...♘e5? 26.♘b6+–) 26.exd5 ♘e5 27.♗e4 ♕d7 28.♖f1± And from the example Simacek – Kanovsky we already know this kind of attack works well.

25...♘c5 26.e5!

The right reaction for the position; the positional threat is exd6, leaving Black with a weak d6-pawn.

26...♗xg2† 27.♔xg2



27...♖a6?

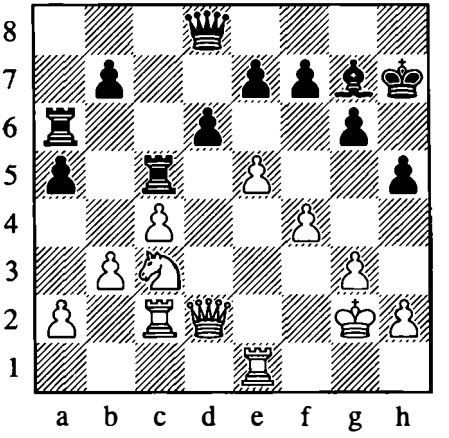
A better defence was 27...♘a6 since after 28.exd6 ♘b4 29.♖cc1 ♕xd6! 30.♕xd6 exd6 Black has just enough time to get rid of his weak d-pawn after 31.♖e2 ♗xc3 32.♖xc3 a4 33.♖d2 axb3 34.axb3 d5 with level chances.

But of course after 27...♘a6 White has the strong 28.♘d5! (threatening ♘b6) which secures an advantage. For example: 28...♖c6 29.♕f2 ♘b4 (or 29...dxe5 30.fxe5 ♕e8 31.♗g5±) 30.♖d2 ♘xd5 31.cxd5 ♖cc8 32.♗d4±

If 27...♘e6 28.exd6 ♕xd6 29.♕xd6 exd6 30.♖d1± the d6-pawn is a serious weakness.

28.♗xc5 ♖xc5

28...dxc5 is met by the simple 29.♖d1! ♕xd2† 30.♖cxd2 f6 31.♖d7 and White wins.



29.♘e4 ♖c8 30.♘g5† ♔g8 31.♕d5

Winning a pawn and the game.

31...♕e8 32.♕xb7 ♕c6† 33.♕xc6 ♖axc6 34.exd6 exd6 35.♖ce2

White has a winning position and the rest is irrelevant to us. Black resigned on move 56.

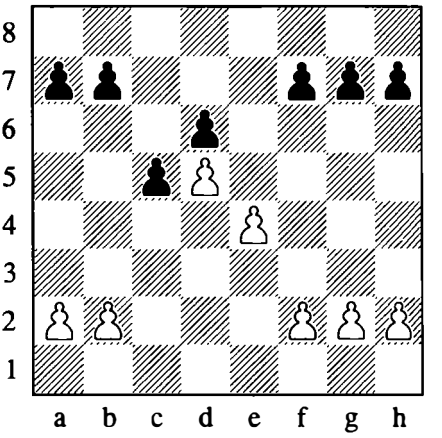
...1–0

Final remarks

1. White's plan of f3-f4 and the resulting position proved to be very promising, as both e4-e5 and f4-f5 were potentially strong breaks. White unfortunately missed two great opportunities to play a strong f4-f5 break.
2. Black's problem in this game was his lack of precision in critical moments. It would have helped to play ...e7-e6 to prevent White's knight from coming to d5, where it created threats and especially allowed the f4-f5 break.

Chapter 12

Asymmetric Benoni



The asymmetric Benoni structure, usually called simply the Benoni, is a very tactical pawn structure that requires great precision from both sides. It typically arises from various Benoni openings, though it also appears in many variations of the Ruy Lopez. The main theme in this structure is the fight between pawn majorities. White has a pawn majority in the centre while Black has his majority on the queenside. The side that manages to push his majority will generally achieve a superior position, and all plans gravitate around this fact. White enjoys some spatial advantage, therefore trading pieces will often work against him. In fact, as pieces are traded, Black's position often becomes better. The reason is that Black has the potential for creating a remote passed pawn, which can be very strong in an endgame. In contrast, White's chances are at their best in a middlegame with many pieces still on the board, since the central majority often provides him with good chances for a mating attack.

Now let's spell out specific plans for each side.

White's plans

1. Break in the centre with e4-e5, either to obtain an attack, or to create a central passed pawn.
2. Break with e4-e5 followed by f4-f5 in order to obtain a kingside attack.
3. Break with f4-f5 followed by a kingside attack, mainly down the f-file.
4. Prevent Black's queenside expansion by playing b2-b4, blocking the advance ...b5-b4.

Black's plans

1. Advance the queenside majority with ...b7-b5, ...c5-c4, ...b5-b4, etc. Create a passed pawn if possible.
2. Pressure down the e-file, preventing White from advancing his central majority.
3. Create kingside counterplay based on ...h7-h5-h4, mainly when White has placed a knight on g3.
4. Break White's centre with ...f7-f5. This break can work wonderfully after White has played f3-f4, since the d5-pawn loses protection.

As we will see later in this chapter, Black's light-squared bishop is often the least helpful piece, as it does not contribute to the advance of the majority, and it is often blocked by the queenside pawns on a6-b5-c4. The first three games in this chapter illustrate White's Plans 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Then we use a short fragment to discuss Black's piece arrangement, and at the same time present White's Plan 4. Then the last two examples display a combination of Black's Plans 1 and 4.

Vladimir Akopian – Levan Pantsulaia

Dubai 2013

Learning objective: This game illustrates White's central break with e4-e5 and the winning attack arising from it.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.♗f4

One of the purposes of placing this bishop on f4 is to disrupt Black's natural development by attacking the d6-pawn.

7...a6

In the event of the natural 7...♗g7 White has the option 8.♕a4† ♗d7 (but not 8...♕d7? 9.♗xd6±) 9.♕b3 giving rise to a long theoretical line in which White scores an outstanding 70%.

8.♘d2

Aiming at c4 (or sometimes e4) attacking the d6-pawn. One objective of this move order is to prevent Black from developing his bishop to the ideal g7-square.

More common is 8.a4 preventing ...b7-b5.

8...♘bd7

Black had the extra possibility 8...b5!? 9.a4 b4 10.♘ce4 with approximately balanced chances.

If Black follows his normal development with 8...♗g7?! then 9.♘c4 0–0 10.a4 and the d6-pawn is under attack (or even 10.♗xd6!?). 10...♘e8 A sad necessity; e8 is a bad square for the knight. 11.♕d2± With a pleasant position for White, as in the game Vaganian – Haik, Marseille 1987.

9.♕c2 ♗e7?!

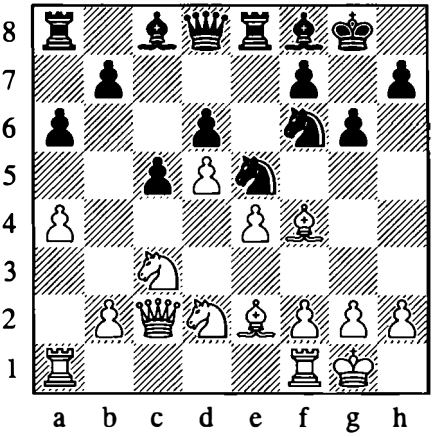
Black has been encouraged to develop his bishop on an inconvenient square. Improving the location of this bishop with ...♗f8-g7 will cost Black two essential tempos.

Probably better was 9...b5!? 10.a4 b4 11.♘ce4 ♘b6 with level chances.

10.a4 0–0 11.e4 ♖e8 12.♗e2

White's position is visibly better, as his pieces are well coordinated towards the goal of breaking in the centre with e4-e5.

12...♗f8 13.0–0 ♘e5



14.♗xe5?

Hoping to accelerate the desired e4-e5 break, but this exchange is positionally unjustified for two reasons:

1. White enjoys a significant spatial advantage and should not trade pieces unnecessarily.
2. White's dark-squared bishop is very strong on the diagonal h2-b8, supporting the break and attacking d6, hence it should stay on the board.

Stronger was:

14.h3!

Covering the g4-square and intending to follow up with ♗h2 and f2-f4 gaining space and preparing either e4-e5 or f4-f5. Black is just not well prepared to prevent this break. For example:

14...♗g7 15.♗h2 ♕c7

Or 15...♕e7 16.f4 ♘ed7 17.♗f3± threatening ♖ae1 followed by e4-e5.

16.a5!

A precise move order, preparing f2-f4 and ♘c4. If 16.f4 ♘ed7 17.♘c4 ♘b6 Black is holding the position.

16...♖b8

16...♘ed7? 17.♘c4±

17.f4 ♘ed7 18.♘c4±

The advantage is huge, due to the threats e4-e5 and f4-f5.

14...♖xe5

It is generally not a good idea to play 14...dxe5? as after 15.a5!± Black's c5-pawn is practically isolated and very weak.

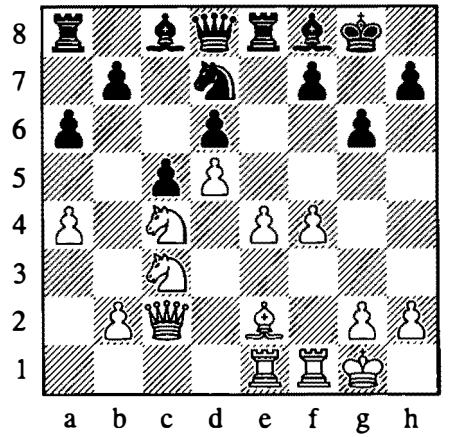
15.♘c4 ♖e8

There now follows a sequence of preparatory moves. White wants to break with e4-e5, while Black would like to achieve ...b7-b5, and of course both sides want to prevent each other's plans.

16.f4 ♘d7

Covering the e5-square.

17.♖ae1



17...♖b8?!

Preparing ...b7-b5.

Better was 17...♘b6! since the trade 18.♘xb6? ♕xb6∓ favours Black as the central break loses strength.

If instead 18.♘d2 ♘d7 when the e4-e5 break is hard to carry out, and maybe White should settle for a draw with 19.♘c4 ♘b6 20.♘d2.

Another option is: 18.♘a3 ♘d7!?

18.a5

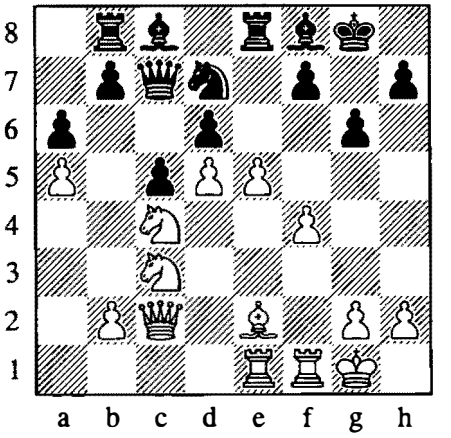
This move is the standard reply against ...♖b8, since it makes ...b7-b5 lose most of its power. The reason is that after 18...b5 19.axb6 Black no longer has a mobile pawn majority on the queenside.

18...♕c7?

A better alternative was 18...b5 19.axb6 ♘xb6 20.♘a5 ♕c7 although White has a comfortable position after 21.♘c6± (or 21.f5!?).

19.e5!

The desired e4-e5 break has been achieved under good conditions. Note that if White still had his dark-squared bishop pressing along h2-b8, Black's position would just be lost.



19...b5?

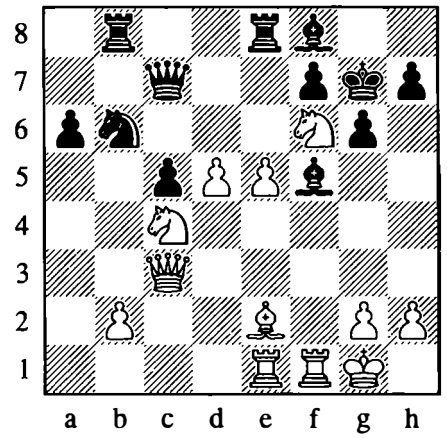
The decisive error.

A better defence was 19...dxe5 although White has several good options, such as: 20.d6! (or 20.♗f3!?) 20...♕d8 21.f5 ♘f6 22.♗d3! ♗g7 (of course not 22...♗xd6? 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♗xg6!+–) 23.♕f2± With strong pressure down the f-file.

20.axb6 ♘xb6 21.♘e4

The threats ♘xd6 and ♘f6† are decisive.

21...♗f5 22.♘f6† ♔g7 23.♕c3 dxe5 24.fxe5



Black resigns. If 24...♖ed8 (or 24...♗d7 25.e6) 25.♖xf5! the rook is untouchable: 25...gxf5?? 26.♕g3† ♔h6 27.♘g8#

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Final remarks

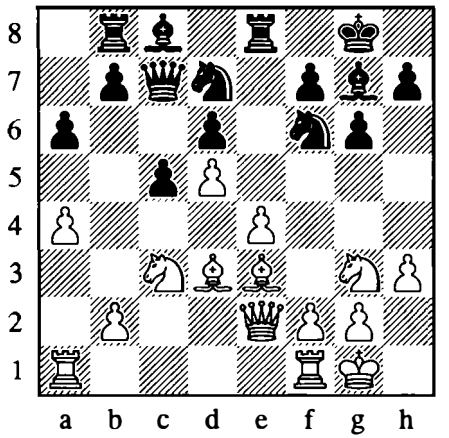
1. White's bishop on f4 proved very useful, as it provoked Black to develop his bishop on the unnatural e7-square.
2. The central break would have been much stronger if White had not traded his dark-squared bishop.
3. Trading pieces often decreases the power of a potential e4-e5 break. For this reason Black had a great chance to equalize with the natural 17...♘b6. It often helps Black to trade off those pieces supporting the e4-e5 break.
4. After the break was achieved, Black's position became very difficult and just one mistake was enough for it to collapse. Nevertheless, even with the best defence, White's attack was very promising.

Christian Gabriel – Mikheil Kekelidze

Germany 1999

Learning objective: This game illustrates White's thematic break with e4-e5 followed by f4-f5, gaining a powerful kingside attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.h3 ♗g7 8.♗d3 0–0 9.♘ge2 a6 10.a4 ♖e8 11.0–0 ♘bd7 12.♘g3 ♕c7 13.♗e3 ♖b8 14.♕e2



Both players have been following the theory relatively closely, and now we reach an unexplored position after:

14...h5!?

This move is a standard part of Black's plan, intended to continue with ...h5-h4 undermining the protection of the e4-pawn.

15.f4?!

This is premature, as Black can quickly bring pressure to bear on the e4-pawn.

Better was 15.♖fe1 as Black's plans are not so easy to carry out. For example: 15...♘e5 16.♗c2 ♗d7? (or 16...h4 17.♘f1 ♘h5 18.♗g5± and the h4-pawn is vulnerable) Hoping for ...b7-b5, but now 17.f4 and the knight is lost.

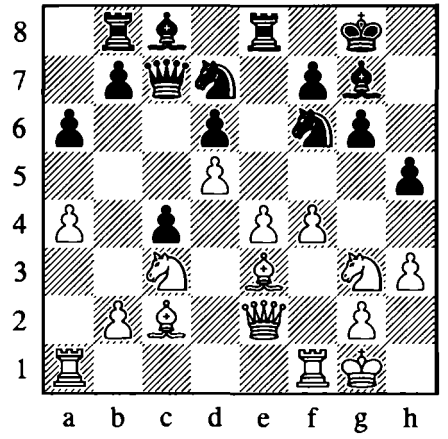
15...c4!

The bishop on d3 is overloaded, defending e4 and preventing ...c5-c4.

The alternative 15...h4!? simply transposes to 16...h4 after 16.♘h1 b5 (or 16...c4 17.♗c2) 17.axb5 c4 18.♗c2 axb5.

16.♗c2

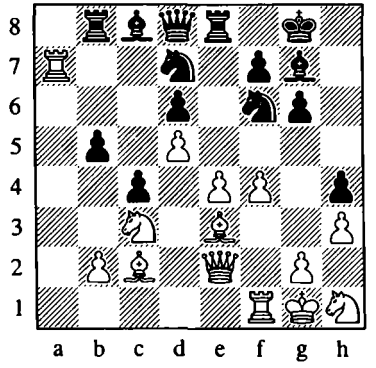
But not 16.♗xc4?! due to: 16...h4 17.e5 (worse is 17.♘h1? ♘xe4 18.♘xe4 ♖xe4∓) 17...hxg3 18.exf6 ♗xf6∓ White's centre has been destroyed.



16...b5?

This structure requires maximum accuracy from both players. In this case, this one mistake drives Black into a near-lost position.

The correct order was 16...h4! pushing the knight away. 17.♘h1 and now: 17...b5! 18.axb5 axb5 19.♖a7 ♕d8∓

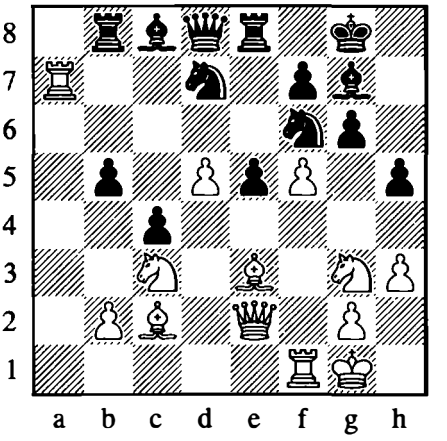


Black has a good position due to his mobile queenside majority. The break 20.e5 dxe5 21.f5 is simply met by 21...♘f8 when Black is holding well, especially since White's knight is not a threat from h1.

17.axb5 axb5 18.♖a7 ♕d8

18...♖b7 is met by: 19.♘xb5!±

19.e5! dxe5 20.f5!±



The reader should remember the sequence e4-e5 followed by f4-f5 as an independent break, an alternative tool in the position. White gives up a pawn in order to open the b1-h7 diagonal for his bishop, and free the e4-square for his knights. At the same time the e5-square is unavailable to Black's knights, making the defence quite difficult.

20...♘f8

Protecting the g6-pawn.

Somewhat more stubborn was 20...e4 to block the b1-h7 diagonal, but after 21.♘gxe4 b4 22.fxg6! fxg6 23.♘xf6† ♘xf6 24.♗xg6 Black's position is near to collapse, say after: 24...bxc3?! 25.♗f7†! ♔h8 26.♖xf6 ♕xf6 27.♕xh5†+–

21.fxg6 fxg6 22.♕f2

Exerting pressure down the f-file, threatening ♗g5 or ♘ce4.

Another winning move was: 22.d6! ♕xd6 (or 22...♗e6 23.♖xg7†! ♔xg7 24.♗g5 ♘8h7 25.♘xh5†! opening lines decisively: 25...gxh5 26.♗xf6† ♘xf6 27.♕xe5) 23.♗xg6!! Leaving the h5-pawn without protection for: 23...♘xg6 24.♖xg7†! ♔xg7 25.♖xf6! Which is winning after 25...♕xf6 26.♘xh5† or 25...♔xf6 26.♘ge4†.

Or: 22.♘ge4!? ♘xe4 23.♗xe4 ♖e7 24.d6! ♕xd6 (or 24...♖xa7 25.♗xa7+–) 25.♖d1 ♕b4 26.♘d5+–

22...♖b7

There is nothing better.

22...♖e7 doesn't help because of: 23.♖xe7 ♕xe7 24.♗c5 ♕e8 25.♗xf8 ♕xf8 26.♗xg6+–

23.♖xb7 ♗xb7 24.♗g5 ♘8h7 25.♘xh5!?

A very nice tactical resource. Even stronger was 25.♗h4! threatening ♗xg6: 25...g5 26.♗xh7† ♘xh7 27.♕f7† ♔h8 28.♕xb7 gxh4 29.♘f5+–

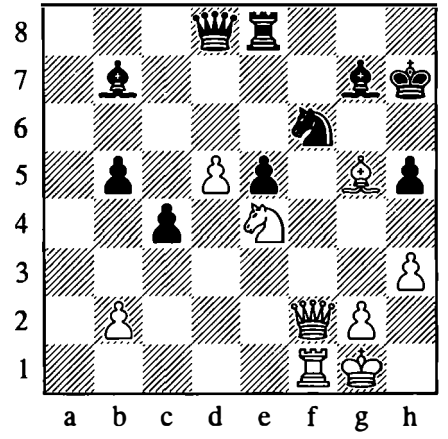
25...gxh5?

The final mistake.

A better defence was 25...♖f8 but after 26.♗xf6 ♘xf6 27.♘xg7 ♔xg7 28.♕c5!± Black's position is about to collapse.

26.♗xh7† ♔xh7 27.♘e4!+–

With a crushing attack; the rest is very simple for White.

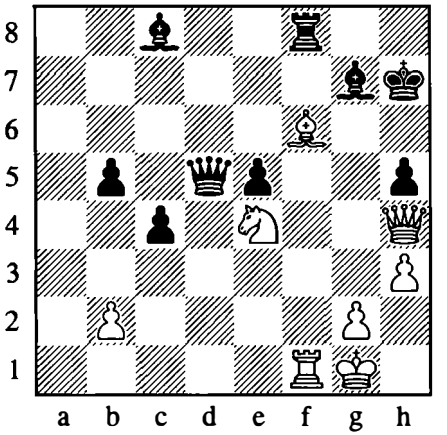


27...♗c8

If 27...♖f8 28.♕f5†! ♔g8 (or 28...♔h8 29.♘xf6 ♗xf6 30.♗xf6†+–) 29.♘xf6† ♗xf6 30.♗xf6 ♕e8 31.♕g5† ♔f7 32.♗xe5#

27...♘xe4? fails to 28.♕f5† ♔h8 29.♗xd8.

28.♗xf6 ♕xd5 29.♕h4 ♖f8



30.♕xh5† ♔g8 31.♕g5 ♖f7 32.♘g3 ♗b7 33.♘h5

Black resigns, as the following lines are convincing: 33...♕d7 34.♗xg7 ♖xg7 35.♘f6† ♔h8 (35...♔f8 36.♘xd7†) 36.♕h6† ♖h7 37.♕f8#

1–0

Final remarks

1. Something to learn from this game is how delicate this structure is. If Black had only played the intermediate 16...h4 he would have had a somewhat superior position. Instead, the imprecise 16...b5 gave White a decisive attack.
2. White's attacking scheme with e4-e5 followed by f4-f5 is often strong, but not always as effective as in this example. Black's problem here was having played ...h7-h5 (weakening g6) in addition to the white bishop's presence on the b1-h7 diagonal, which added pressure to the g6-pawn.

Nikita Vitiugov – Ding Liren

St Petersburg 2012

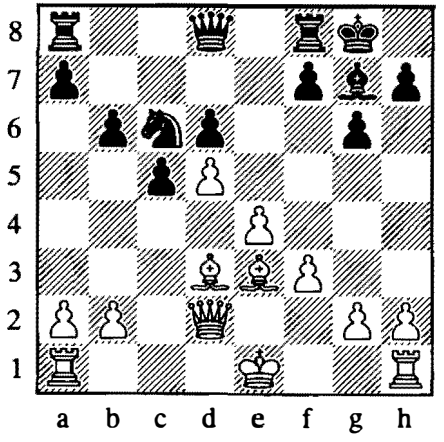
Learning objective: This game is an example of White's attack based on the f4-f5 break.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0–0 6.♗e3 c5 7.♘ge2 b6

This is a rare but reasonable continuation, as the move ...b7-b6 is useful in the pawn structure of this chapter.

The main line is: 7...♘c6 8.d5 (after the capture 8.dxc5 dxc5 9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.♗xc5 Black usually finds enough compensation after 10...♘d7 11.♗e3 ♘de5 12.♘f4 b6⩲) 8...♘e5 9.♘g3 e6 10.♗e2 exd5 11.cxd5 a6 12.a4 With a position similar to Hellsten – Cordova, which is analyzed later in this chapter.

8.d5 e6 9.♘f4 exd5 10.♘fxd5 ♘c6 11.♕d2 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗e6 13.♗d3 ♗xd5 14.cxd5



Finally we have reached the structure of interest. Having two minor pieces off the board already, Black is doing quite well, and is likely to gain the initiative provided he proceeds precisely.

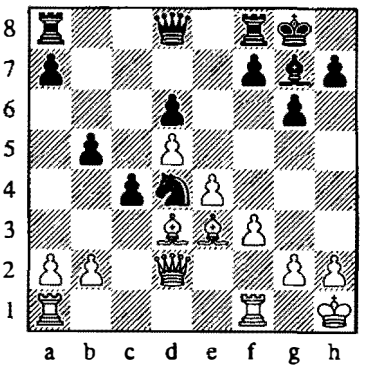
14...♘d4?

This move does not quite fit with the position. Black's main plan is to advance the queenside majority, but it will be difficult to push ...c5-c4 with a knight on d4.

Much stronger was 14...♘e5 threatening ...♘xd3 followed by ...♗xb2, and meeting 15.♗e2 with 15...f5!. This break weakens White's position while also neutralizing future efforts to expand with f3-f4 and e4-e5. A possible continuation is 16.exf5 (or 16.0–0 fxe4 17.fxe4 ♕d7∓) 16...♘c4! 17.♗xc4 ♕h4† 18.♔d1 ♕xc4 19.fxg6 hxg6∓ when Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

15.0–0 b5 16.♔h1 ♕d7

To illustrate why 14...♘d4 was a poor decision, note that the desired 16...c4? runs into problems after:



17.♗b1! (but not 17.♗xc4? ♘xf3! 18.gxf3 bxc4=) 17...♕f6 (17...♕b6? 18.♖d1+–) 18.♗g5 ♘xf3 (or 18...♕e5?! 19.f4 ♕e8 20.f5!±) 19.gxf3 ♕xb2 20.♗c2± Black does not have enough for the lost piece.

17.♖ae1 b4

17...c4? loses to 18.♗b1.

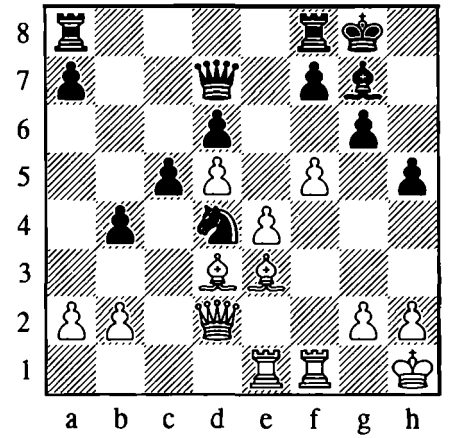
18.f4 h5?

This move is hard to understand. Is it possible that Black did not expect White's reply?

If 18...♖ac8 the strong 19.f5!± gets back into trouble similar to the game, for example: 19...♗e5 20.♗xd4 ♗xd4? (20...cxd4 21.♕xb4±) 21.f6!+– But the natural 18...♖fc8 19.f5 ♗e5 yields a

complex position with level chances. The try 20.♗xd4 ♗xd4 21.e5? is simply met by 21...♗xe5 22.♖xe5? dxe5 23.f6 ♕d8 24.♕h6 ♕f8–+ when Black is just in time to prevent mate.

19.f5!±



This is a perfect occasion to carry out the f4-f5 plan, as the g6-pawn is weak and White is ready to embark on decisive mating threats.

19...♗e5

The best continuation.

Worse is 19...♕e7? due to 20.♗g5 ♕e5 21.f6 ♗h8 22.♗h4! (threatening ♗g3xd6) 22...♕e8 23.e5 dxe5 24.♕g5 with decisive threats such as ♖xe5 followed by ♗xg6.

20.♗xd4 ♗xd4?

This mistake allows White to lock the bishop away from the defence.

Necessary was: 20...cxd4 21.♕h6 ♗g7 22.♕g5 ♖ae8 23.f6 ♗h8 (or 23...♖e5 24.♕d2 ♗h8 25.♕xb4±) 24.♖c1±

21.e5!+–

Black's d4-bishop can no longer protect the kingside, and the attack becomes irresistible.

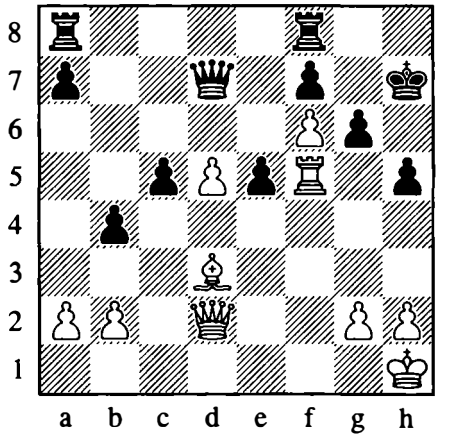
21...♗xe5

Or 21...dxe5 22.f6 e4 23.♖xe4 threatening ♕h6 (but not 23.♕h6? ♗xf6!). 23...♕d6 24.♖xd4! cxd4 25.♕h6+–

22.♖xe5 dxe5 23.f6

Threatening ♕h6-g7#.

23...♔h7 24.♖f5!



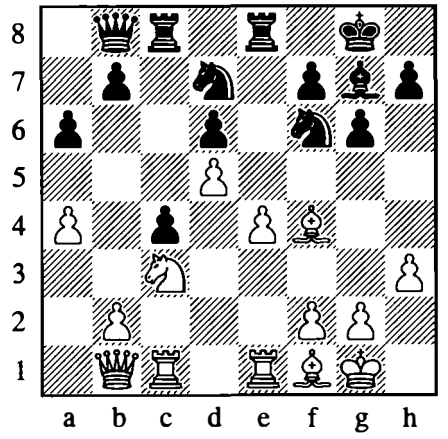
Black resigns. The threat of ♖xh5 decides the game since 24...gxf5 (24...♕xf5 25.♗xf5 gxf5 26.♕g5 ♖g8 27.♕xh5#; 24...♖fd8 25.♖xh5† ♔g8 26.♕h6 gxh5 27.♕g7#) loses to: 25.♕g5 ♖g8 26.♕xh5#

1–0

Final remarks

1. The trading of pieces favours Black in this position, and Black could have proved this by playing the natural 14...♘e5 followed by ...f5 disrupting White's centre. Black's biggest mistake was to play 14...♘d4, because this knight needs protection. As a consequence, Black was unable to advance his majority in a natural way with ...c5-c4.
2. White's f4-f5 attack worked particularly well because Black had weakened his kingside with ...h7-h5.

Black's piece arrangement and White's b2-b4 plan



The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Mikhalevski – Guseinov**, Novi Sad 2009. Black's pieces are arranged ideally. The bishop on g7 has a long range of action supporting the queenside expansion. Meanwhile, Black's knights combine the tasks of preventing White's expansion and pressuring the e4-pawn. However, the reader may notice Black's coordination would be disrupted if he had a light-squared bishop. Where could this bishop go? As a general rule, we could say that Black's light-squared bishop does not find a natural place in the asymmetric Benoni structure, and this position is an example of this rule. The game continued:

20...b5 21.axb5 axb5

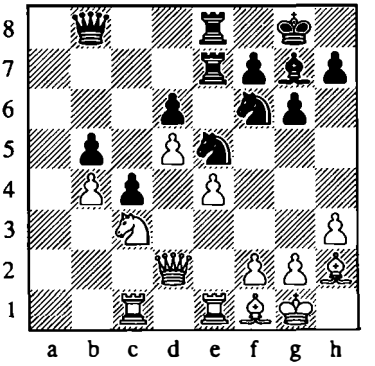
This is a critical moment for White; Black will soon play ...♘c5, ...b5-b4 and begin to create serious threats on the queenside and in the centre. Meanwhile White's central breaks are several moves away. Hence, the only reasonable continuation is:

22.b4!

If 22.♗h2 preparing f2-f4 and e4-e5, then after 22...♘c5 (threatening ...b5-b4 and ...♘xe4) 23.f3 ♘fd7 24.♖cd1 b4 25.♘a2 b3 26.♘c3 ♘e5 Black is already winning! For example, 27.♗xe5 ♗xe5 28.♕c1 ♘a4! 29.♘xa4 ♕a7† 30.♕e3 ♕xa4 31.♖b1 c3 and the advanced passed pawn decides the game.

22...cxb3?!

Preferable was 22...♖e7 23.♕c2 ♖ce8 24.♗h2 ♘e5 25.♕d2.



Nevertheless, Black requires some precision to maintain equality. Note how Black's b5-pawn is no longer a threat, but rather a potential weakness.

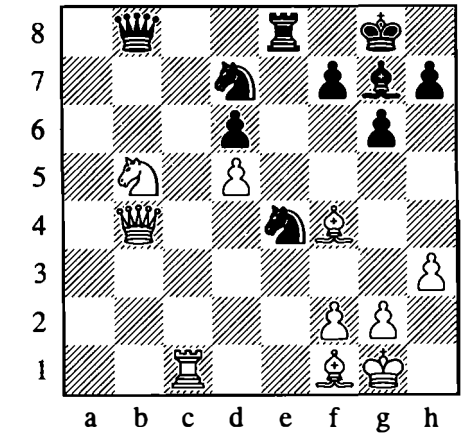
23.♕xb3

Now the b5-pawn is lost.

23...b4

Worse is 23...♘c5? 24.♕b4!± protecting the e4-pawn, and preparing ♘xb5.

24.♘b5 ♖xc1 25.♖xc1 ♘xe4 26.♕xb4±



White enjoys a very small but lasting advantage due to his bishop pair.

Pavel Eljanov – Teimour Radjabov

Wijk aan Zee 2008

Learning objective: This game illustrates Black's queenside play, combined with the ...f7-f5 break, decisively undermining White's centre.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗d3 0–0 6.♘ge2 c5 7.d5 e6 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗f4

An alternative was 9.♗h4 g5 10.♗g3 ♘h5 11.0–0 ♘a6 12.a3 ♘c7 with a complex position as in the game Navara – Dominguez Perez, Havana 2011.

9...♘g4!?

Keeping the centre undefined. Black reserves the possibility to continue with ...e6-e5 if convenient.

An alternative was 9...exd5!? 10.cxd5. (But not 10.exd5?! as after 10...♘h5! 11.♗d2 ♘d7 12.b3 ♘e5 13.♗c2 ♖e8 14.0–0 the typical break 14...b5!∓ allows Black to take the initiative. This break is discussed further in the next chapter.) 10...♘a6!? With a standard Benoni position, which is similar to the game.

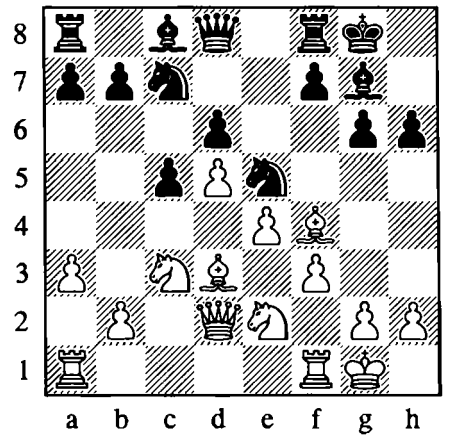
10.♕d2 ♘a6 11.a3 ♘c7 12.f3 ♘e5 13.0–0 exd5

Black could convert this position into a King's Indian Type II with 13...♘xd3 14.♕xd3 e5 15.♗e3 f5!? with a complex structure which we will study in Chapter 15.

14.cxd5

Black reaches the asymmetric Benoni under good conditions, as he will be able to trade some pieces to alleviate the space problem and to decrease the power of White's central breaks.

The strange-looking 14.exd5 deserves attention, though after 14...♘xd3 15.♕xd3 ♗f5 16.♘e4 ♕d7 Black has a good version of next chapter's structure, and chances are level.



14...♘xd3

The right decision, planning to continue with 15...b6, when Black begins to fight for the initiative.

Bad is 14...a6?! as after 15.♗xe5! dxe5 (15...♗xe5 loses a pawn to 16.♕xh6) 16.a4± and Black's queenside majority is no longer threatening, and White enjoys a lasting advantage due to his strong passed pawn on d5.

15.♕xd3 b6!

A natural decision; Black may follow with ...♗a6xe2 trading his least useful piece to then proceed with his standard queenside plans.

16.♕d2

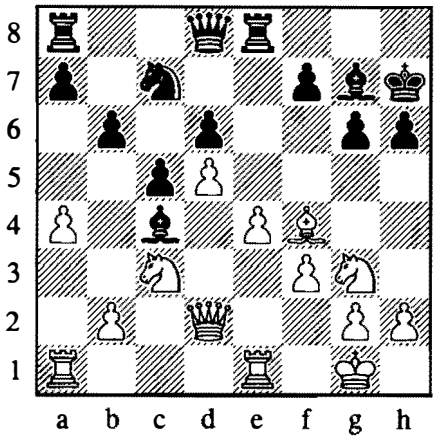
Attacking the h6-pawn.

16...♔h7 17.♘g3

This awkward move was probably played in order to prevent ...♗a6xe2 trading the light-squared bishop. Unfortunately for White, his knight is doing very little on g3.

An option was 17.a4 ♗a6 18.♖fe1 ♕d7 to be followed by ...♖ae8 and ...f7-f5, when Black is doing well.

17...♗a6 18.♖fe1 ♖e8 19.a4 ♗c4!



Black prepares to advance with ...a7-a6 and ...b6-b5-b4, or invade White's camp with ...♘a6-b4. The reader should notice how the bishop on c4 is by no means useless, as it disrupts the coordination among White's forces.

20.♘f1

White realizes the bishop on c4 is too annoying, and decides to chase it away with ♘f1-e3.

If 20.♗e3, opening the way for the f-pawn, then 20...♘a6! 21.f4 ♘b4∓ when Black's minor pieces severely undermine the coordination of White's forces.

20...♗xf1

The natural reaction. Trading minor pieces decreases the potential of White's central breaks, while Black's queenside majority becomes more threatening.

21.♖xf1 a6 22.♗g3 ♕d7 23.♖ae1 b5

The queenside majority starts to roll. White is only slightly worse, but in practice his position is difficult and psychologically uncomfortable as he has lost the initiative, and the desired central breaks are hard to carry out.

24.f4?

This premature attempt to accelerate the central breaks undermines the chain e4-d5, and will backfire against White's centre.

Safer was 24.♔h1 f5!? 25.exf5 ♟xf5 26.a5 (worse is 26.axb5?! axb5∓ as the open a-file benefits Black) 26...♖ad8!? when Black's position is preferable in practice, due to the potential to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

24...b4

Also strong was 24...f5 25.exf5 (or 25.e5 dxe5 26.fxe5 b4∓ and the d5-pawn is falling) 25...♕xf5 26.♖d1 b4 27.♘e2 b3!?∓ to be followed by ...♖ab8-b4 and ...♕c2 targeting the b2-pawn.

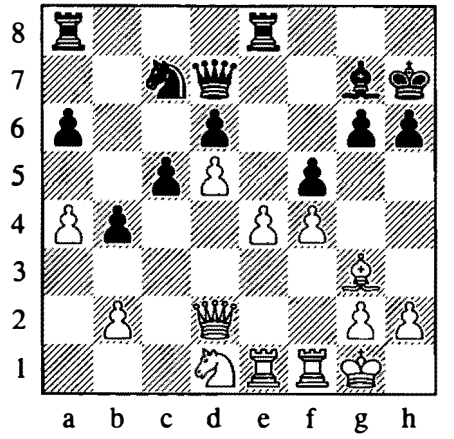
25.♘d1

Or 25.♘b1 f5!∓ is similar to the game.

25...f5!∓

The reader should become familiar with this thematic break. After White has advanced f3-f4, the break ...f7-f5 can be very powerful, as the d5-pawn loses its support. In this game, Radjabov managed to carry out this break with perfect timing, and now the d5-pawn is unavoidably lost. White's position falls apart.

If 25...♕xa4? White is in time to create counterplay with 26.f5 ♕d7 27.f6 ♗f8 28.b3 followed by ...♘b2-c4 with an unclear position.



26.exf5

Worse is 26.♘f2?! due to 26...♗d4! threatening 27...fxe4 27.♔h1 ♗xf2 (or 27...♕xa4!?) 28.♕xf2 ♖xe4.

Of course 26.e5 fails on account of 26...dxe5 27.fxe5 ♕xd5.

26...♕xf5 27.♘e3 ♖xe3!

This is the key, temporarily sacrificing an exchange in order to win the d5-pawn.

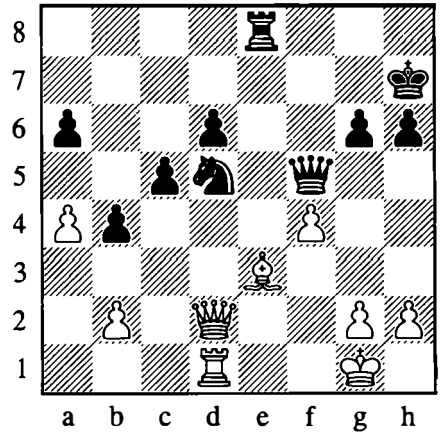
28.♖xe3 ♗d4 29.♗f2 ♗xe3 30.♗xe3 ♘xd5 31.♖d1

After a series of forced moves we reach a seemingly calm position. White is a pawn down and it seems he might recover it by pressing down the d-file, but Black has an energetic response:

31...♖e8!

This enables Black to keep the initiative.

Instead 31...♘xe3? 32.♕xe3 ♕f6 33.b3 gives some compensation for the pawn, since Black cannot easily push his queenside majority.



32.♗f2

A better attempt was:

32.♕xd5 ♕xd5 33.♖xd5 ♖xe3.

But the resulting rook endgame is an easy win for Black.

34.♖xd6

Or 34.♖d2 ♖b3 35.♔f1 d5! 36.♖xd5 ♖xb2 37.♖xc5 ♖a2 as analyzed below.

34...♖e2 35.♖xa6?!

Or 35.♖c6 ♖xb2 36.♖xc5 ♖a2 winning the a4-pawn and the game, since 37.a5? loses immediately to 37...b3 38.♖c7† ♔g8 39.♖b7 b2 threatening ♖a1 and b1=♕.

35...♖xb2

Now material is equal, but the connected passed pawns give Black a decisive advantage, for example:

36.a5 c4 37.♖c6 c3 38.a6 ♖a2 39.h3 c2 40.a7 b3

The best defence was 32.♗xc5! dxc5 33.♕xd5 ♖e1†! 34.♔f2 ♖xd1 35.♕xd1 ♕xf4† when Black should be winning, but some technique is required.

32...♘xf4–+

There is no defence as Black is two pawns up.

33.♕xd6?

Making things even easier for Black.

As IM Torrecillas points out, 33.♗e3 is refuted by 33...♕g4! 34.♗xf4 ♖e2 35.♕d5 ♕xf4.

33...♕e4!

White resigns. There is no satisfactory defence against the checkmate threat on g2: 34.♕d7† ♖e7 35.♕g4 ♘e2† winning the queen.

0–1

Final remarks

1. The reader should notice how Black did not clarify the situation in the centre until he had played ...♘a6-c7 and was ready to trade some minor pieces. These two elements are helpful in this structure, hence Black's opening strategy proved effective in this regard.
2. One of Black's most memorable ideas in this game is 15...b6 followed by 17...♗a6 and 19...♗c4, to obtain activity for the light-squared bishop and ultimately trade this piece and only then push the queenside majority.
3. White's biggest mistake was the reckless 24.f4, undermining the otherwise healthy f3-e4-d5 pawn chain. Black's 25...f5 reply was rather obvious and very strong; it is a break to remember.

Johan Hellsten – Emilio Cordova

Buenos Aires 2006

Learning objective: This game illustrates how Black may combine chances of kingside and queenside play after breaking in the centre with ...f7-f5.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.♘ge2 ♗g7 8.♘g3 a6 9.a4

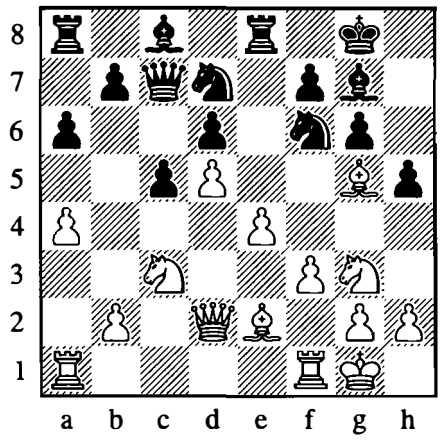
Preventing ...b7-b5.

9...h5!?

This is typical when White's knight is on g3. Black may later play ...h5-h4 to claim some space on the kingside and pressure the e4-pawn.

10.♗e2 ♘bd7 11.♗g5 ♕c7 12.0–0 0–0 13.♕d2 ♖e8 14.f3

This move serves two purposes: it supports the e4-pawn and it frees the f2-square for the future ♘g3-h1-f2 manoeuvre.



14...♘h7 15.♗e3 ♘e5 16.♘h1

So far both sides have followed the standard plans for this position. White now begins the typical manoeuvre ♘h1-f2 to further support his centre and perhaps prepare the f3-f4 and e4-e5 advance.

16...♗d7 17.♘f2

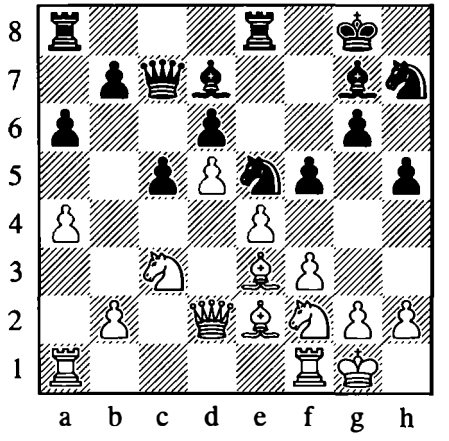
It is not a good idea to play: 17.f4?! ♘g4 18.♗xg4 ♗xg4 19.♘f2 (instead 19.f5? threatening h2-h3, runs into 19...♗xf5! 20.exf5 ♖xe3∓ 21.♕xe3?? ♗d4–+) 19...♗d7∓ Black is ready for ...b7-b5, while White is unlikely to achieve a kingside break.

If 17.h3 (threatening f3-f4 trapping the knight) then 17...b5! allows Black to unleash his forces on the queenside after: 18.axb5 axb5 19.♘xb5 ♗xb5 20.♗xb5 ♖xa1 21.♖xa1 ♖b8 22.♗f1 (or 22.♖a5 ♖xb5! 23.♖xb5 ♘c4 24.♕c1 ♘xe3∞ 25.♕xe3?? ♗d4–+) 22...♖xb2! This is the key move. After 23.♕d1 ♕b7 it is White who must fight for equality, as the c5-pawn can advance and become a dangerous threat.

17...f5

A standard rupture in this position, claiming space on the kingside and pressing against White's centre.

Now the usual 17...b5?! does not work as well due to 18.axb5 axb5 19.♘xb5 ♗xb5 20.♗xb5 ♖xa1 21.♖xa1 ♖b8 22.♖a5! when White is just in time to maintain the extra pawn.



18.h3?!

This is probably intended to cover the g4-square, preparing the f3-f4 advance. Unfortunately for White, the weakening of the g3-square is a far more important issue.

Probably better is 18.exf5 gxf5 19.♘h3 followed by ♘f4 with a good position, due to the weakness of the h5-pawn and the e6-square.

18...h4!?

A double-edged yet standard decision in this position. Black gains control of the g3-square, but the h4-pawn may become weak in some cases.

An alternative was 18...♘f6 19.exf5 (or 19.f4 ♘f7=) 19...gxf5 20.♖ac1 ♕a5 with level chances.

19.♖ae1 ♕a5

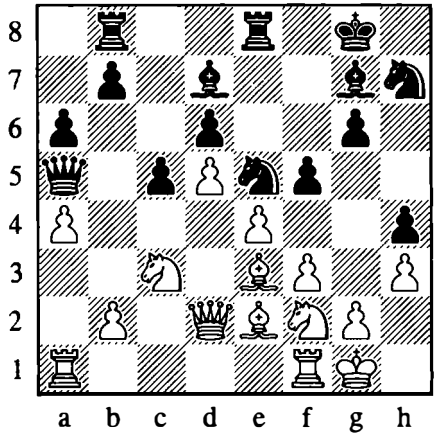
Threatening ...b7-b5 advancing the queenside majority.

20.♖a1

Preventing ...b7-b5 for now.

20...♖ab8

Of course not: 20...b5? 21.axb5+–



21.♕c2

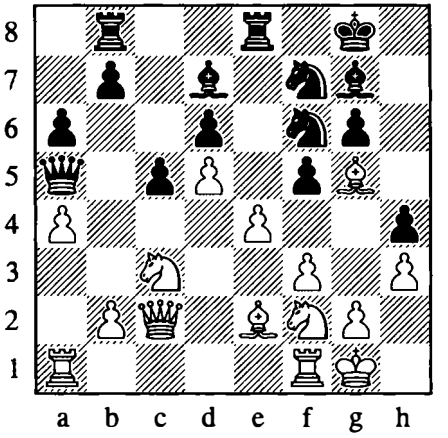
The last three moves are evidence of Black's success with ...f7-f5. Without the possibility of expanding on the kingside, White finds himself marking time due to the lack of targets to attack.

21...♘f6

Slowly heading to the g3-square via h5.

22.♗g5 ♘f7!

This is one of my favourite moves in the game, and the reader should pay close attention to it. Black has advanced with ...h7-h5-h4 gaining control of the g3-square. White reacts with the usual ♗g5 intending to capture this pawn, but Black's move presents him with a dilemma: can he really capture the pawn?



23.♗d2?

This natural-looking move is a serious mistake. By not accepting the challenge, White cedes the initiative and his position becomes extremely uncomfortable due to the lack of targets.

Necessary was the capture:

23.♗xh4 f4

An alternative is: 23...g5!? 24.♗g3 f4 25.♗h2 ♘h5∞

After the text move, Black is threatening ...g6-g5 trapping the bishop, so now the best continuation is:

24.♘d3

If 24.♗xf6 ♗xf6 Black's control of the dark squares gives him a good position despite being a pawn down.

Or 24.♘g4?! ♘xg4 25.hxg4 ♗e5∓ when Black obtains a dangerous attack after ...♔g7 and ...♖h8.

24...c4 25.♘c1 ♘h5!?

Black has good compensation for the pawn, as he can continue to advance on the queenside with

...b7-b5-b4, while White's kingside attempts are currently on standby.

23...♘h5!

Heading to the strong g3-square.

24.exf5?!

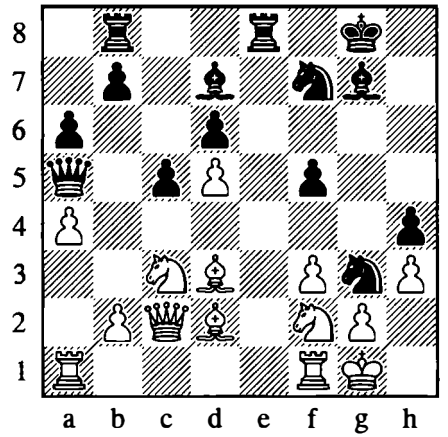
The opening of the e-file only benefits Black.

Better was 24.♗d3 ♘g3 25.♖fe1 ♕c7 26.♗f1 b5∓ when White has a very uncomfortable position.

24...gxf5

Of course Black should recapture with the pawn to cover the key e4-square.

25.♗d3 ♘g3∓



Black achieves a dream position for this pawn structure. His queenside majority has strong potential and may soon begin to advance. Meanwhile, his kingside pawns on f5 and h4, together with the strong knight on g3, are enough to neutralize all of White' efforts to create counterplay in this sector.

26.♘ce4?!

Hoping to trade the knight on g3.

A somewhat better defence was 26.♘cd1 ♕d8 27.♘e3 hoping to gain activity on the kingside, but after: 27...♕f6! (instead 27...♘xf1?! 28.♖xf1 ♘h6 29.♘xf5 ♗xf5 30.♗xf5 ♘xf5 31.♕xf5 ♕f6 32.♕h5 gives White some counterplay) 28.♗c3 ♕g6 29.♖fe1 ♗xc3 30.bxc3 (or 30.♕xc3 ♘e5∓) 30...♕g5∓ Black dominates the board.

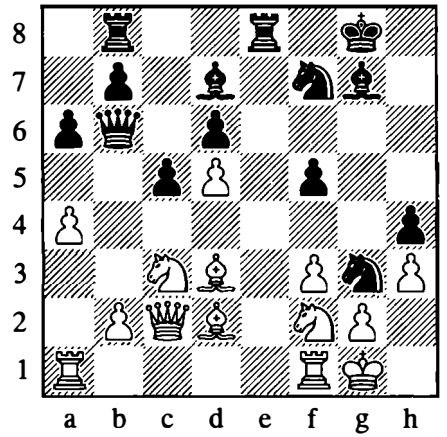
26...♕b6!

A strong move, preventing White's plan. Black's advantage becomes decisive.

Instead 26...♕c7? allows White to solve his problems after 27.♘xg3 hxg3 28.♘d1 since the f5- and g3-pawns are weak, and the strong knight on g3 is off the board.

27.♘c3

Instead 27.♘xg3? loses a piece after 27...hxg3 28.♘d1 c4†.



27...♕c7

Black does not even bother to trade his strong knight for the passive rook on f1. He plays according to the spirit of this structure, intending to advance the queenside majority with ...c5-c4, and ...b7-b5-b4.

Even stronger was: 27...♗d4! 28.♖ad1 c4! 29.♗xc4 ♖bc8 30.♗d3 ♘e5–+ White's position is desperate because he cannot release his pieces, for example: 31.♗g5? ♗xa4! 32.♕xa4 ♘xd3 33.♖xd3 ♗xf2† 34.♖xf2 ♖e1† 35.♔h2 ♖h1#

28.♖fe1

Freeing the f1-square for the bishop, which would otherwise be lost after ...c5-c4.

28.♖fd1 doesn't help: 28...c4 29.♗f1 ♕c5 30.♗c1 b5 and the advance of the queenside majority is decisive.

Or 28.♖ad1? c4 when the bishop is lost.

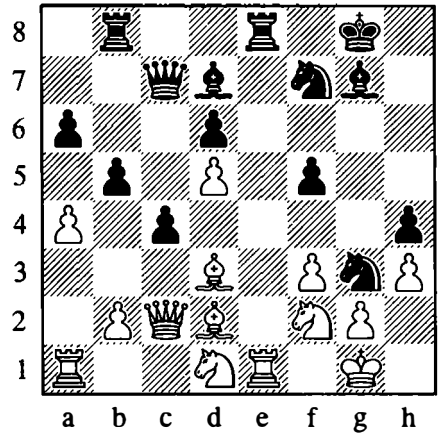
Preventing ...c5-c4 with 28.b3 is not effective after 28...b5 29.axb5 axb5 30.♖ac1 and now the simple 30...b4!? (or the more ambitious 30...c4! 31.♘cd1 ♘e5 with a crushing queenside attack) 31.♘a2 ♘xf1 32.♖xf1 ♕c8 is easily winning for Black.

28...c4 29.♘cd1

The alternative 29.♗f1 is similar to the game after 29...♗d4 30.♘cd1 b5 31.♗c3 ♖xe1 32.♗xe1 ♕c5–+ when White's forces are completely tied up.

29...b5

Of course not: 29...cxd3?? 30.♕xc7+–



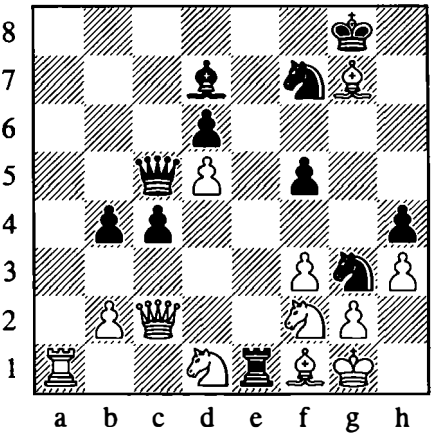
30.axb5 axb5 31.♗f1 ♕c5 32.♖xe8† ♖xe8 33.♗c3 b4

Black does not even bother to capture the d5-pawn; he has bigger goals in mind.

34.♗xg7

Or: 34.♗d2 c3! 35.bxc3 bxc3 36.♗xc3 ♖e1! (threatening ...♖xf1 winning) 37.♗xe1 ♕xc2 And Black wins.

34...♖e1!



A great final blow! White resigns. There is no satisfactory defence against the threat of mate in three. For example: 35.♗f6 (or 35.♘e3 ♖xa1 36.♕d2 ♔xg7) 35...♖xf1† 36.♔h2 ♖h1†! 37.♘xh1 ♘f1#

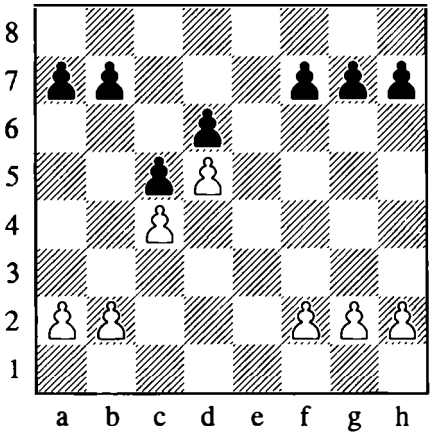
0–1

Final remarks

1. The critical moment in the game was after the move 22...♘f7, and White's biggest mistake was not to accept the challenge with 23.♗xh4.
2. Once Black gained the initiative there was little White could do to fight back. This is often the case in the Benoni structure; the position is difficult to hold once Black's queenside majority begins its march.
3. Black's ...f7-f5 break is often well met by exf5 followed by a knight transfer to f4 (and possibly e6). If White does not take advantage of Black's vulnerable king, then he is likely to fall into a passive position, as in this game.

Chapter 13

Symmetric Benoni



The symmetric Benoni structure is one of my favourites, and it is one of the structures that motivated me to write this book. It often arises from Benoni variations in which White recaptures exd5 instead of cxd5, which yields the more typical Benoni position we studied in the previous chapter. Unlike the previous chapter in which Black had clear plans to gain counterplay, now Black faces a dilemma of what to do. Black can often develop his pieces to obtain what seems to be an equal position, but White usually retains a small spatial advantage. This advantage increases if White manages to expand on the kingside, restricting Black's pieces substantially. Black's play can be rather difficult, and great precision is required to avoid being asphyxiated. A main theme in this variation is whether Black manages to trade off some minor pieces to decrease his space problem. In addition, the control of the e4-square is often an important factor to determine whether Black can equalize or not. Let's discuss specific plans:

White's plans

1. Expand on the kingside with f2-f4, g2-g4 and potentially create an attack.
2. Attack the vulnerable d6-pawn with a bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal and a knight on e4.
3. Sometimes White will also play b2-b4, but there is really not much to be gained on the queenside. In fact, opening the queenside could give Black chances for much-needed counterplay.

Black's plans

1. Control the e4-square and occupy it with a knight.
2. Break on the queenside with ...b7-b5, and obtain counterplay against a potentially weak d5-pawn.
3. Trade off minor pieces to decrease the space problem. Sometimes this can be achieved with the sequence ...♕b6, ..♗f5 and ...♘e4 which can also create pressure against the b2-pawn.

White's kingside expansion is the most important plan in the position, and Black's plans are aimed at fighting against it. After White plays f2-f4, Black should typically reply with ...f7-f5 to claim some space before it is too late. Later he should be ready to prevent g2-g4, as White could gain a decisive spatial advantage with this expansion. Black's Plan 2 is probably the most active and interesting reaction, and should be considered in a variety of positions even in the form of a pawn sacrifice. The virtue of this sacrifice is that it opens many lines, and may turn White's kingside expansion into a weakening.

The first game in this chapter is an older example which illustrates White's Plan 1 being executed to perfection. Then, the second game is a more modern version where Black finds a better defensive plan, though still remaining passive. The third game illustrates White's Plan 2, while White's Plan 3 is not really covered simply because it is not as important or useful. Then, the last three games in the chapter illustrate Black's Plans 1-3 in that order.

Boris Spassky – Robert Fischer

Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (26) 1992

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White's kingside expansion can totally suffocate Black's forces.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6 4.♘c3 g6 5.e4 ♗g7 6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘f3 ♗g4 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 ♘bd7

Planning the trade ...♘e5xd3.

The alternative 9...e6 does not change the character of the game. For example: 10.0–0 exd5 11.exd5 ♘fd7!? (or 11...♘bd7 12.♕d1± transposing to the game) 12.♕d1 ♖e8 13.f4 f5 14.♕f3 ♘a6 15.a3 ♘c7 16.g4!?± This is somewhat similar to the game.

10.♕d1!

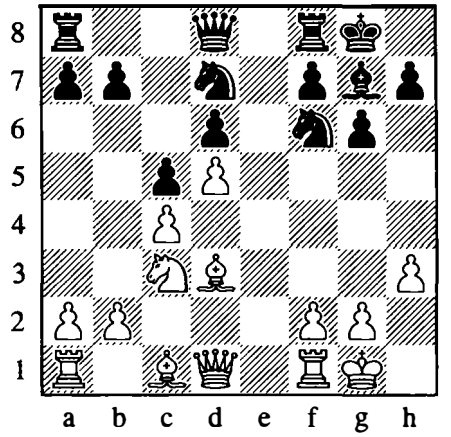
The game is heading toward a symmetric Benoni, hence trading pieces must be avoided to make use of the space advantage.

Imprecise is 10.0–0?! ♘e5 11.♕e2 ♘xd3 12.♕xd3 a6= when Black has good counter-chances associated with the break ...b7-b5.

10...e6 11.0–0 exd5 12.exd5!±

An appropriate decision. White has firm control of the e4-square and Black will soon run out of useful moves.

Worse is 12.cxd5?! a6 13.a4 ♖e8 14.♗g5 ♕c7 reaching the previous chapter's structure. In this case White has nothing special, as none of his standard plans are strong in this position, while Black's pieces are very well arranged. In addition, Black's light-squared bishop, the least useful piece in the structure, is already off the board.



12...♘e8 13.♗d2

The alternative 13.♗f4!? has pros and cons: it pressures the d6-pawn, but prevents the f2-f4 expansion.

13...♘e5

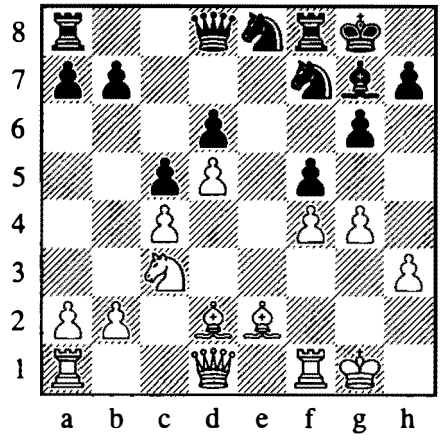
A standard move is 13...♘c7!? intending to create queenside counterplay with ...b7-b5, and now a possible continuation is 14.♕b3 temporarily preventing it. (White should refrain from 14.a4?! weakening the b4-square too soon, and after 14...f5! claiming space on the kingside, 15.♕b3 ♖b8 16.f4± Black is quite close to equality.) 14...♘e5 (14...b5? 15.cxb5±) 15.♗e2 f5 16.f4 ♘d7 17.♖ae1± With a small advantage due to space.

14.♗e2 f5 15.f4

Gaining space on the kingside, and preventing Black's counterplay with ...f5-f4.

15...♘f7 16.g4!

White does not miss a chance to put pressure on Black's kingside; his advantage is already evident.

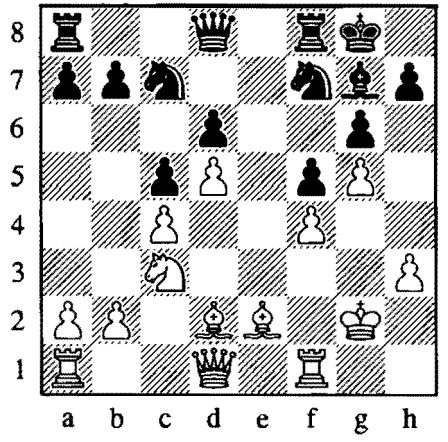


16...♘h6

The try 16...♕h4?! is simply met by 17.♔g2± threatening g4-g5 trapping the queen.

If 16...fxg4 17.hxg4 White's king is much safer than Black's. For example, 17...♗d4† 18.♔g2 ♘c7 19.♖h1 ♕f6 20.♘e4 ♕g7 21.♕c2± where White has a significant advantage due to his superior space and coordination.

17.♔g2 ♘c7 18.g5 ♘f7



19.♖b1

This move is rather unnecessary.

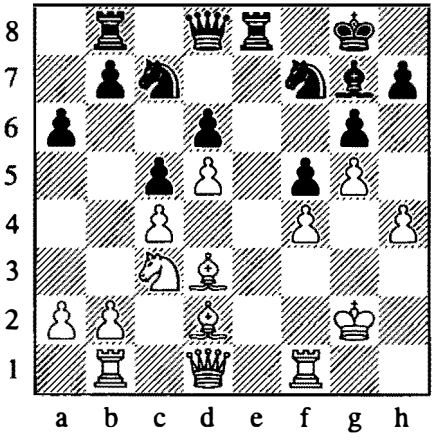
It was better to develop the kingside initiative with 19.h4 and then:

a) The break 19...b5? is premature due to 20.cxb5 ♖b8 21.a4± as there is no compensation for the pawn.

b) 19...h5!? This double-edged move might be necessary. 20.gxh6 (or 20.♗d3!?± aiming to sacrifice a piece on the kingside by means of ♘e2-g3-f5 or h5) 20...♘xh6 21.h5 gxh5 22.♗xh5 ♗d4 23.♖h1± White is much better prepared to fight along the g- and h-files.

c) 19...a6 20.a4 ♖b8 21.h5± White may play positionally with h5-h6, or tactically with ♖h1, ♗d3 and ♕f3-h3. Black's pieces are very restrained, making defence difficult.

19...♖e8 20.♗d3 ♖b8 21.h4 a6



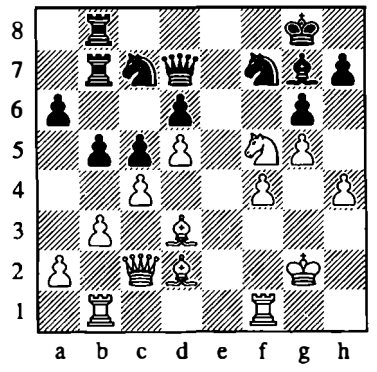
22.♕c2

Also possible is 22.a4!? since the break 22...b5?! does not work as well: 23.axb5 axb5 24.♘xb5 ♘xb5 25.cxb5± Though Black's chances of counterplay are better here than in the game.

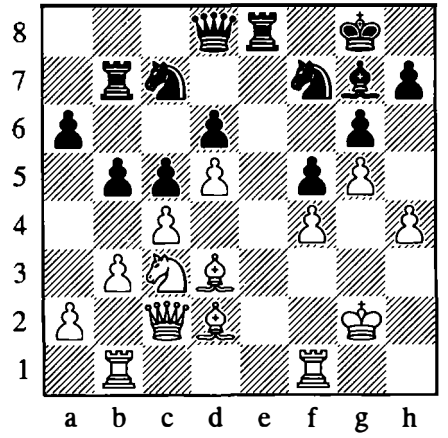
Instead 22...a5 with the idea of ...♘a6-b4 is too slow, for example 23.h5 ♘a6 24.♕f3 ♘b4 25.♖h1 ♘xd3 26.♕xd3 followed by a decisive invasion down the h-file.

22...b5 23.b3 ♖b7

Another option was 23...♕d7 planning to double rooks on the b-file. Ftacnik suggested the interesting variation: 24.♘e2 (24.h5!?±) 24...♕b7 25.♘g3 ♖eb8 26.♘xf5!!



26...bxc4 (26...gxf5 27.♗xf5 ♕d8 28.♗xh7† and White's attack is devastating) And now Black's counterplay is repelled with: 27.bxc4 ♖b2 28.♘g3!± ♖xc2? 29.♖xb8† ♘e8 30.♗xc2+–



24.♖be1

Trading a pair of rooks limits Black's counterplay, while White's attacking chances remain intact.

The immediate 24.h5!?± was strong too.

24...♖xe1 25.♖xe1 ♕b8

Preventing the expansion h4-h5-h6 with 25...h5!? allows 26.♘e2! threatening ...♘g3xf5 or ...♗xf5, and now 26...♕b8 27.♘g3 bxc4 28.♗xc4 ♘b5 29.♕d3± leaves Black in a precarious position due to the weakened kingside and the lack of counterplay.

26.♗c1

Covering the b2-square.

Again 26.h5!? is possible. After 26...bxc4 27.♗xc4± White's queenside remains rock solid while his kingside play keeps on rolling.

26...♕d8

26...bxc4 doesn't help after 27.bxc4± since Black does not have any targets down the b-file.

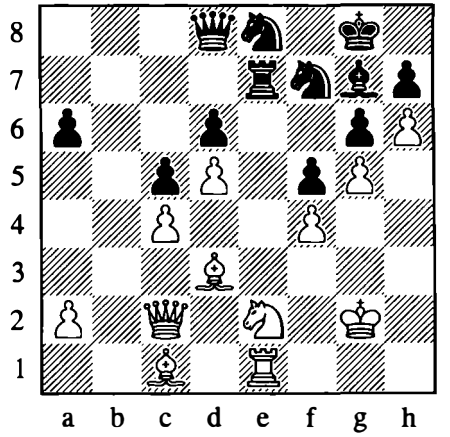
27.♘e2 bxc4 28.bxc4

Note that Black has no entry points on the b-file.

White is also better after 28.♗xc4?! but the d5-pawn is turned into a weakness unnecessarily.

28...♘e8 29.h5 ♖e7 30.h6!+–

Another strong continuation was 30.♖h1 ♖b7 31.♘g1! planning ♘f3-h4 pressuring the g6-pawn. Black's position is about to collapse. For example: 31...♕e7 32.♘f3 ♘d8 33.hxg6 hxg6 34.♘h4 ♔f7 (or 34...♕f7 35.♗e2!+– followed by ♘xg6) 35.♕d1!+– And there is no good defence against the threat of ♘xg6.

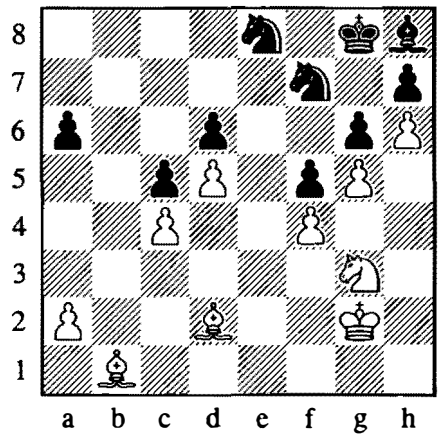


The game is positionally won and the rest is a beautiful example of Spassky's technique.

30...♗h8

Even worse is 30...♗f8?! 31.♗b2 since White's occupation of the long diagonal is deadly for Black.

31.♗d2 ♖b7 32.♖b1 ♕b8 33.♘g3 ♖xb1 34.♕xb1 ♕xb1 35.♗xb1



Now White's king will march to the queenside while Black's king cannot easily abandon the kingside, due to the potential sacrifice ♘xf5 followed by ♗xf5 and ♗xh7.

35...♗b2 36.♔f3 ♔f8 37.♔e2

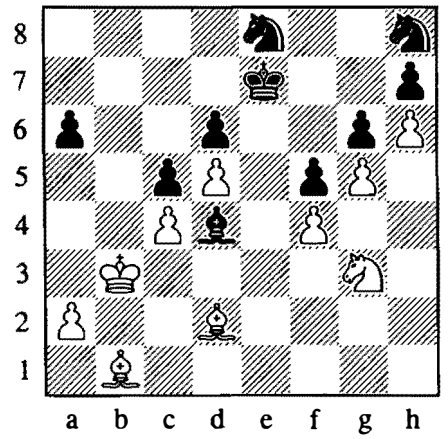
Another option was: 37.♘xf5!? gxf5 38.♗xf5 ♔g8 39.♗c8 ♘c7 40.♗a5+–

37...♘h8

Preparing ...♔e7. Centralizing the king at once with 37...♔e7? fails to 38.♘xf5†! gxf5 39.♗xf5 followed by ♗xh7 winning easily.

38.♔d1 ♔e7 39.♔c2 ♗d4 40.♔b3

Black's queenside is defenceless.



40...♗f2

40...♔d7? runs into 41.♘xf5! gxf5 42.♗xf5† ♔e7 43.♗xh7 and the pawns quickly decide the game.

41.♘h1?!

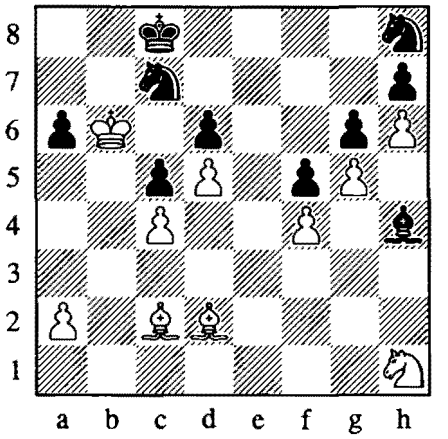
This is unnecessary, but still winning.

Easier was 41.♘xf5†! gxf5 42.♗xf5 ♔f7 (now there is no time for 42...♘g6? 43.♗xg6 hxg6 44.h7) 43.♗xh7 when the three passed pawns win easily.

41...♗h4

41...♗d4 doesn't help due to 42.♔a4 ♔d7 43.♔a5 ♘c7 44.♘g3! followed by ♘xf5 winning.

42.♔a4 ♘c7 43.♔a5 ♔d7 44.♔b6 ♔c8 45.♗c2

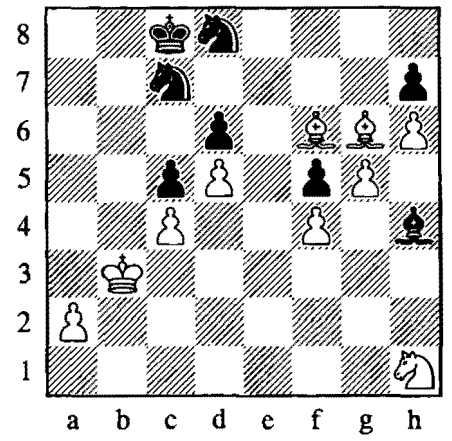


The entrance of White's bishops decides the game; the rest is simple.

45...♘f7 46.♗a4 ♔b8 47.♗d7 ♘d8 48.♗c3!

Black is in zugzwang.

48...♘a8† 49.♔xa6 ♘c7† 50.♔b6 ♘a8† 51.♔a5 ♔b7 52.♔b5 ♘c7† 53.♔a4 ♘a8 54.♔b3 ♔c7 55.♗e8 ♔c8 56.♗f6 ♘c7 57.♗xg6!



57...hxg6 58.♗xd8
1–0

Final remarks

1. I feel amazed every time I see this game. Black was positionally crushed, and it is not even obvious what his mistake was.
2. I believe Black's biggest mistake was choosing to play this type of structure under unfavourable conditions. In recent years, White has scored over 80% from the position after 10.♕d1; this should tell us something.
3. Black's biggest problem was being unable to prevent White's expansion with g2-g4. In an ideal case, Black would have had a knight on f6 and a bishop on c8 preventing such an advance.
4. After White's 18th move g4-g5, I cannot find any good suggestions for Black. His position is bad, and his defensive task near impossible to conduct.
5. As the reader may have noticed, the opening of the kingside often turned out to favour White. This is a characteristic inherited from the structure c4-d5 vs. c5-d6: this tiny spatial advantage makes all the difference.

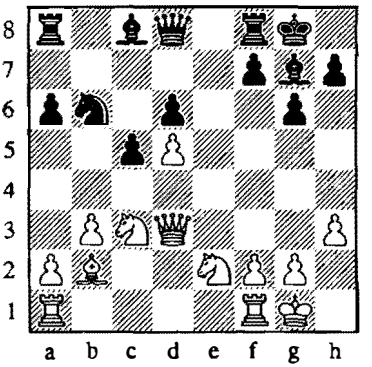
Vladimir Malakhov – Alexander Grischuk

Russian Championship, Moscow 2010

Learning objective: This game is an example of how the symmetric Benoni structure is treated in modern practice. It is important to note how Black prevents the expansion g2-g4.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 0–0 5.♗d3 d6 6.♘ge2 c5 7.d5 e6 8.h3 exd5 9.exd5 ♘fd7 10.f4

Inaccurate is 10.0–0?! ♘e5, as White is now unable to keep his d3 bishop on the board. 11.b3 ♘xd3 12.♕xd3 b5! Black gains activity! 13.cxb5 (or 13.♗f4!? g5 14.♗h2 f5∞) 13...a6! 14.b6 (14.bxa6? loses material after 14...♗xa6∓ due to the pin down the a1-h8 diagonal) 14...♘d7 15.♗b2 ♘xb6∓

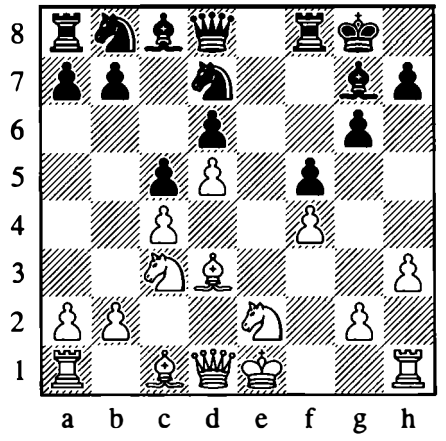


White's position is aimless. The once-glorious d5-pawn is now a weakness, while Black's pieces are very well coordinated.

10...f5

Claiming some space on the kingside and blocking White from expanding further.

10...♕h4†!? 11.g3 ♗xc3†?! (the option 11...♕e7 leads to a position similar to the game) 12.♔f1! (12.bxc3? ♕e7= Now Black will easily gain control of the critical e4-square.) 12...♗xb2 13.♗xb2± White has good compensation due to Black's exposed king (and also possible was 13.gxh4!?).



11.0–0 ♖e8

Preventing ♗c1-e3.

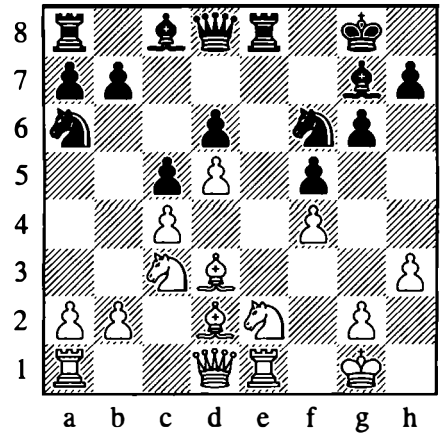
The possibility 11...♘a6!? is analyzed later in this chapter, on page 253.

12.♗d2 ♘a6 13.♖e1

Attempting to expand with 13.g4? loses a pawn after 13...fxg4 14.hxg4 ♕h4.

Inaccurate is 13.♕b3?! ♘b4 14.♗b1 b5! when Black once again obtains a good position by correctly breaking with ...b7-b5: 15.cxb5 ♘b6 16.a3 ♘4xd5! 17.♘xd5 ♗e6 18.♘ec3 c4! 19.♕d1 ♘xd5∓

13...♘f6



Unlike the previous game, Black now keeps an eye on the key squares e4 and g4. Note how the key advance g2-g4 is temporarily unfeasible.

14.♘g3 ♖xe1† 15.♗xe1

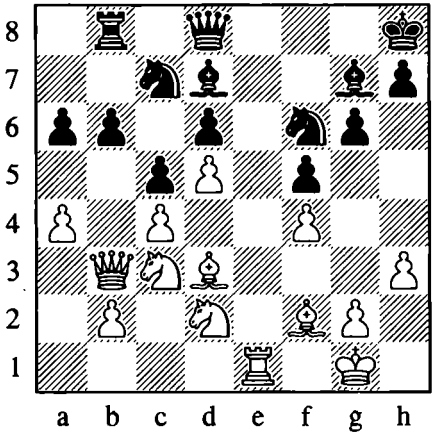
The current position is relatively flexible, and for the next several moves both sides play schematically. Black prepares a potential ...b7-b5 break, which White intends to prevent.

15...♗d7 16.a3 ♔h8 17.♗f2 ♖c8 18.♕b3 ♖b8 19.♖e1 b6 20.♘f1

The knight on g3 was not very useful, so White heads to f3 via d2.

20...♘c7 21.♘d2 a6 22.a4

Preventing ...b6-b5.



22...♘h5 23.g3 ♗e8 24.♘f3 h6

This is necessary to prevent ♘g5.

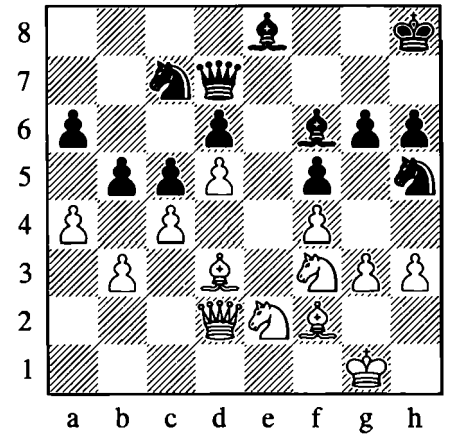
25.♕c2 ♗f7

The desired break 25...b5?! runs into tactical problems after: 26.axb5 axb5 27.♘xb5 ♘xb5 28.cxb5 ♗xb5 29.♗xb5 ♖xb5 30.♘h4! ♔h7 (30...♕f6? 31.♖e6+–) 31.♘xg6! This is the key move. 31...♔xg6 32.g4 ♕f8 (32...♘f6? fails to 33.♕xf5† ♔f7 34.g5+–) 33.gxh5† ♔h7 34.♕a4 ♖xb2 35.♕d7 Black is under pressure.

26.♕e2 ♗f6 27.♕d2 ♕d7 28.b3 ♖e8 29.♖xe8† ♗xe8 30.♘e2 b5?!

This break only favours White, as it allows a queen invasion.

Better was 30...a5 eliminating all queenside breaks, though White preserves a small edge, say after 31.♘h2 preparing g3-g4: 31...♘a6 32.g4 ♘g7 33.♔g2 ♘b4 34.♗b1±



31.axb5 axb5 32.♕a5

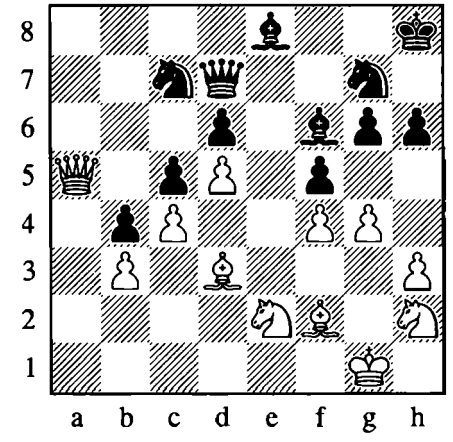
Another option was 32.b4!? bxc4 33.♗xc4 cxb4 34.♕xb4± when White has more space and good piece coordination.

32...b4 33.♘h2!

An important move, preparing g3-g4.

33...♘g7 34.g4!±

In similar style to the Spassky – Fischer game, this advance secures White an advantage.



34...♕e7

Releasing the tension with 34...fxg4 does not help Black, as it increases White's central dominance: 35.hxg4 h5 36.g5 ♗d8 37.♕a1± White preserves a small edge due to the weaknesses on d6 and g6.

35.♘f3

The alternative 35.♘f1!?± followed by ♘e3 deserves attention.

35...♕d7 36.g5!

A well-timed advance.

36...♗d8

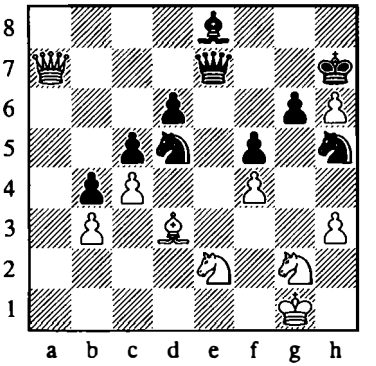
36...hxg5?! This trade only gives White a nice square on f4. 37.fxg5 ♗d8 38.♕a1 ♔h7 39.♘f4± White is in control.

Now, as Krasenkow points out, White should have played:

37.♕a1!

In fact, I like this move so much I will leave it as the main variation.

Instead, Malakhov spoiled his position with 37.gxh6? throwing away his positional edge and weakening his structure. 37...♘h5 Now Black threatens to play ...♘xd5, so: 38.♕a7 ♔h7 39.♗h4? This careless move allows Black to take the lead (better was 39.♕a1 ♗f6 40.♕d1 ♔xh6 41.♔g2= which should be drawn). 39...♗xh4 40.♘xh4 ♕e7! 41.♘g2? (41.♕b8! would have offered more resistance.) 41...♘xd5!



Black was winning and White resigned on move 56. A sad result for White, after a very good game.

37...♔h7 38.♘g3

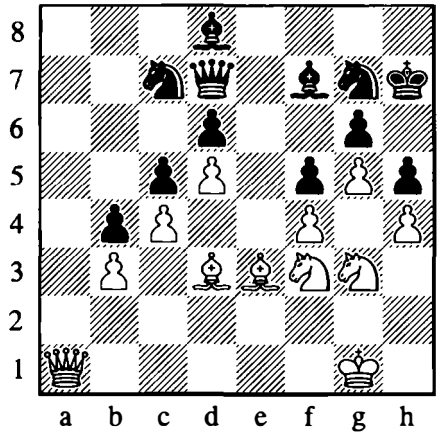
Instead 38.h4?! would be met by 38...♘h5! pressuring the f4-pawn and preventing most of White's threats.

38...♗f7?!

Allowing White to consolidate further.

Somewhat better is 38...hxg5 39.♘xg5† ♔g8 40.h4± though White retains an advantage and has a potential h4-h5 break.

39.h4 h5 40.♗e3±



The position is fairly symmetrical and relatively simplified, but White has great winning chances due to his ideal piece arrangement and spatial advantage. Let's see a possible continuation:

40...♗e7 41.♔f2

The imprecise 41.♗c1?! could be met by 41...♘xd5!? 42.cxd5 ♗xd5 43.♘d2 ♕e6 with some chances of counterplay.

41...♗f8 42.♗c1 ♕e7 43.♗b2

Creating pressure down the main diagonal. Black's pieces slowly become tied up.

43...♔g8

43...♘ge8, attempting to play ...♗g7 to decrease the pressure, runs into 44.♘xh5! gxh5 45.♗xf5† ♔g8 46.♗d3! followed by f4-f5 or g5-g6 with a big advantage.

44.♘e1

Improving the other knight, heading towards e3 to prepare a potential piece sacrifice.

44...♕d8 45.♘c2 ♕e7

A better defence was 45...♗e8 46.♘e3 ♗d7 keeping an eye on the f5-pawn, though after 47.♕b1? this sacrifice is still threatened.

46.♘e3 ♔h7?

A careless move which accelerates White's winning attempts.

Again 46...♗e8 was more stubborn.

47.♕b1!

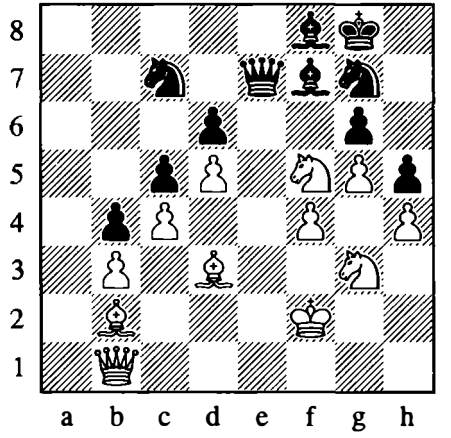
Threatening to win with ♘xf5.

The immediate 47.♘exf5!? is tempting but somewhat premature.

47...♔g8

47...♘ce8? loses on the spot after: 48.♘gxf5! gxf5 49.♘xf5 ♘xf5 50.♗xf5† ♔g8 51.♗h7#

48.♘exf5!+–



48...gxf5 49.♗xf5
Threatening ♗h7#.

49...♘xf5 50.♕xf5
Threatening ♘e4-f6.

50...♗g7
Or 50...♗e8 51.♘e4 ♗g7 52.♗f6 ♕d7 53.♕xd7 ♗xd7 54.♗xg7 ♔xg7 55.♘xd6+– followed by ♘e4xc5.

51.♗xg7 ♔xg7 52.♕c8!
And now Black cannot prevent material loss. This fictitious game could have finished after:

52...♗g6 53.f5 ♕f7 54.♔g1 ♗h7 55.f6† ♔g6 56.♕f5#
The reader should remember that the actual game was won by Grischuk, as Malakhov chose the wrong path with 37.gxh6.

Final remarks

1. Black played much better than in the game Spassky – Fischer. The main difference was a more precise piece arrangement which prevented an early g2-g4 expansion.
2. Despite Black's precise opening sequence, White always preserved a small plus, which becomes manifest around move 30 due to his unstoppable plan to play ♘h2 followed by g3-g4 claiming some kingside space.
3. White's mistake 37.gxh6 was a colossal positional concession. Instead, the calm 37.♕a1 would have provided excellent winning chances without any risks.

Ivan Morovic – Mahmood Lodhi

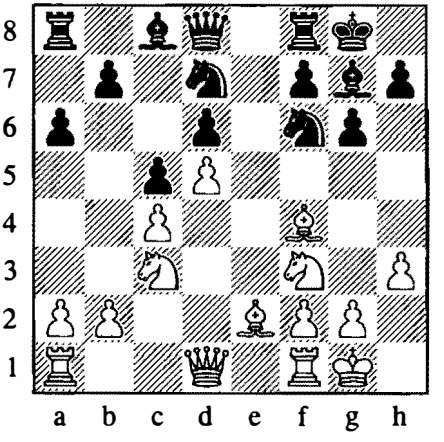
Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White may pressure Black's vulnerable d6-pawn.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6 4.♘c3 g6 5.e4 ♗g7 6.♘f3 0–0 7.h3 e6 8.♗e2 exd5 9.exd5 ♘bd7?!
More common is 9...♖e8 10.0–0 ♘e4 trading off a piece to alleviate the space disadvantage. 11.♘xe4 ♖xe4 12.♗d3 ♖e8 13.♗g5± White's position is preferable due to his space and lead in development.

Another option is 9...♗f5 10.g4 ♗e4 11.♗f4 (11.0–0!?) 11...♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♘e8 with a double-edged position, as in Goloshchapov – Vaulin, Zadar 2000.

10.0–0 a6 11.♗f4!±
Due to the inaccurate 10...♘bd7, the d6-pawn has become a weakness.



11...♕c7 12.♕d2 ♖e8
If 12...♘e8 intending to follow up with ...♘e5 simplifying the position, then 13.♖ad1! leaves Black in an awkward position since 13...♘e5? is met by: 14.♗xe5 dxe5 15.d6 ♕d7 16.♖fe1 ♖b8 17.♕d5+–

13.♖fe1 ♘b6

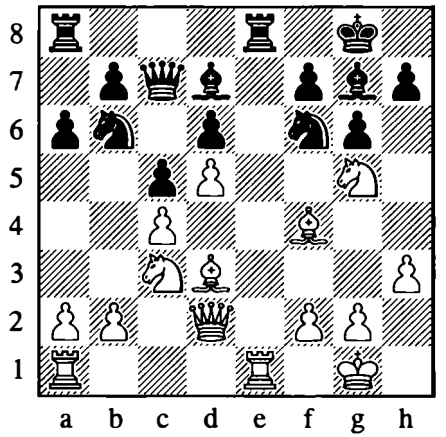
A rather strange choice, but Black needs to complete his development.

As usual, the break 13...b5!? gives Black some counterplay, though after 14.cxb5 ♘e4 15.♘xe4 ♖xe4 16.bxa6± Black's activity does not fully compensate for the pawn.

Trading pieces with 13...♘e4 14.♘xe4 ♖xe4 15.♗d3 ♖xe1† 16.♖xe1 ♘e5 17.♘xe5 dxe5 18.♗e3± gives White a lasting advantage due to the passed pawn on d5.

No better is 13...♘f8?! 14.♗d3 ♗d7 15.♘g5! followed by ♘ge4 with a big advantage.

14.♗d3 ♗d7 15.♘g5



White intends ♘ge4 to increase the pressure on the d6-pawn.

15...♖xe1†?

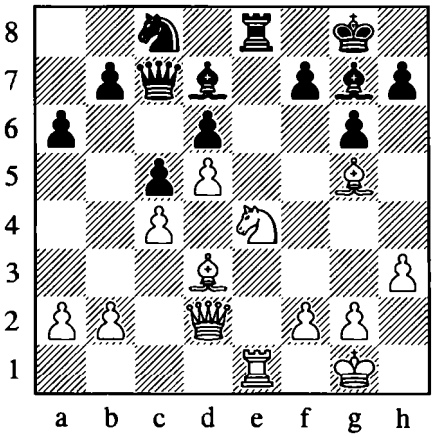
After this serious mistake, Black's position will suddenly be on the verge of collapse.

A better defence was: 15...♘a4! 16.♘ce4 ♘xe4 17.♘xe4 ♘xb2!? (17...♖xe4!? 18.♖xe4 ♘xb2 19.♖ae1± leaves Black with some compensation for the exchange) 18.♘xd6 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 ♗xa1 20.♖xa1 With the threat of ♕c3 followed by ♗h6 or ♘f5 forcing Black to return the exchange: 20...♕a5 21.♘xe8 ♖xe8 22.♗e3±

16.♖xe1 ♖e8

The computer-like defence 16...♘h5!? seems like the only resource for Black: 17.♗h2 ♖f8 18.♘ce4 ♘c8 White has a big advantage, but there is no immediate way to capitalize upon it.

17.♘ge4 ♘xe4 18.♘xe4 ♘c8 19.♗g5!±



The invasion on f6 will force Black to give up his dark-squared bishop. White's advantage is nearly decisive.

19...f5

19...♔h8 does not help either, due to 20.♗f6! threatening ♗xg7 followed by ♕c3: 20...♗xf6 21.♘xf6 ♖xe1† 22.♕xe1 ♕d8 23.♕c3 Black loses material by force.

20.♘f6† ♗xf6 21.♗xf6 ♔f7

Or 21...♖xe1† 22.♕xe1 ♔f7 23.♗g5+– threatening ♕c3-f6 or h3-h4-h5.

22.♗g5 b5 23.♗h6 ♕d8?!

The last resource was 23...♖xe1† 24.♕xe1 b4 blocking lines to prevent White's entrance, though Black still loses after 25.a3! a5 26.♗g5! threatening b3 followed by ♕a1 (but note the imprecise 26.b3? is met by 26...♕d8 27.♕a1 ♕f6).

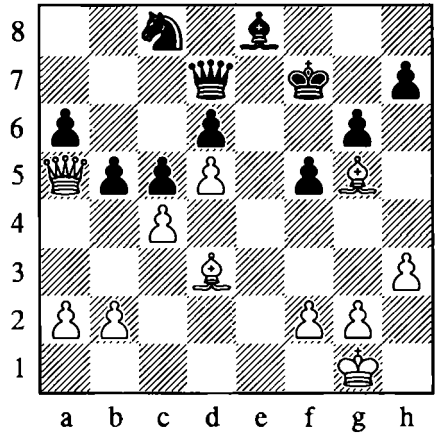
24.♖xe8 ♗xe8 25.♗g5! ♕d7

25...♘e7?! fails to 26.♕c3 followed by the crushing ♕f6.

25...♕c7 26.♕e1 (planning ♕e6) 26...♕d7 27.cxb5! (27.♕a5!? transposes to the game) 27...axb5 28.♗xb5! ♕xb5 29.♕e6† And mate is unstoppable.

26.♕a5

The white forces penetrate Black's camp; the battle is decided.



26...♕b7 27.♕d8 ♕d7 28.♕f6† ♔g8 29.cxb5

The tempting 29.♗h6? fails to 29...♕e7! forcing the trade of queens.

29...axb5 30.♗xb5!

Decoying Black's queen from the defence of the kingside.

30...♕xb5 31.♗h6
1–0

Final remarks

1. White's decision to attack the d6-pawn, instead of carrying out the kingside expansion from the previous two games, was well justified. White's knight on f3 was an obstacle to such a plan, while Black's 10...♘bd7 turned the d6-pawn into an immediate target.
2. The weakness of the d6-pawn was so serious it prevented Black from ever coordinating his forces.

Giorgi Kacheishvili – Daniel Fernandez

Mesa 2009

Learning objective: This game illustrates how Black may gain counterplay by taking control of the key e4-square.

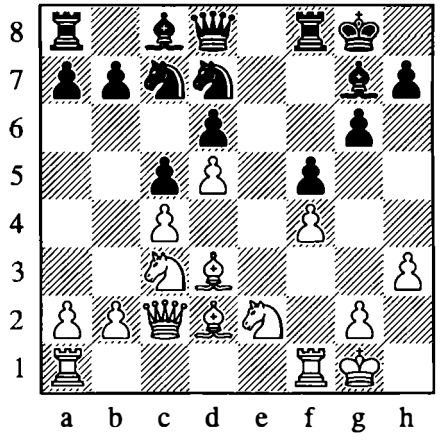
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 g6 4.♘c3 ♗g7 5.e4 d6 6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘ge2 e6 8.h3 exd5 9.cxd5 ♘fd7 10.f4 f5 11.0–0 ♘a6 12.♗d2

It is slightly more accurate to play 12.♗e3 in order to transfer the bishop to f2. 12...♖e8 13.♗f2 ♘c7 14.♕c2 a6 15.a4 a5 16.♖ae1± With a tiny advantage for White.

12...♘c7

The knight transfer to c7 is part of the usual scheme, preparing the typical ...b7-b5 break.

13.♕c2



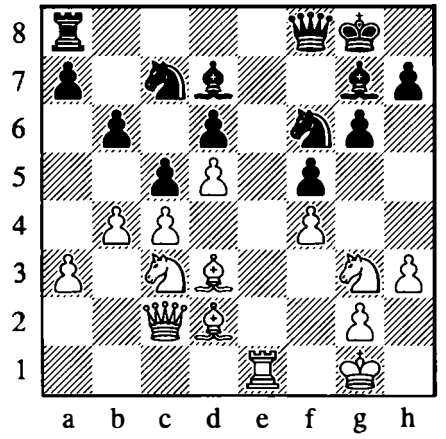
13...♘f6

An option was 13...b5!? 14.♘xb5 ♘xb5 15.cxb5 ♗b7 16.♘c3 (after 16.♖ad1 ♘b6 17.♘c3 ♖e8 Black has good counterplay; the game is approximately level) 16...♖e8 when Black has reasonable compensation for the pawn.

14.a3 ♗d7 15.b4 b6 16.♖ae1

The alternative 16.bxc5 bxc5 17.♖ab1 ♖e8 18.♔h2 ♖b8 gives White only the tiny advantage that is typical of this structure.

16...♖e8 17.♘g3 ♖xe1 18.♖xe1 ♕f8



This simple move is very effective, as after ...♖e8 White's advantage will only be symbolic.

19.♗e2?!

White starts to go down the wrong path; retaining control of the e4-square is essential.

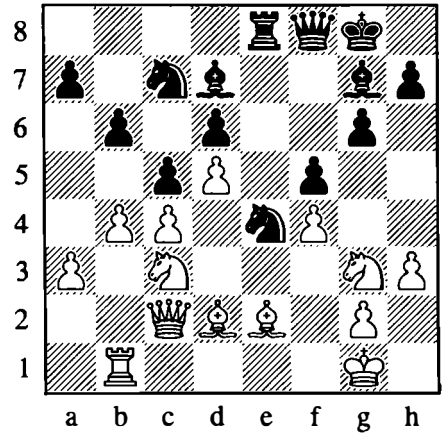
A plausible line was 19.♕b3 ♖e8 20.♖xe8 ♘cxe8 21.♗e3 with equality.

19...♖e8 20.♖b1?!

Going even further away from e4.

20...♘e4!

Black has gained the initiative by understanding the importance of controlling e4.



21.♘cxe4 fxe4 22.♖f1

The pawn cannot be taken by 22.♘xe4? because of 22...♖xe4! 23.♕xe4 ♗f5 when the rook on b1 is hanging.

22...♗d4† 23.♔h2 ♕e7

An interesting alternative was 23...e3 24.♗e1 ♕g7 with an unclear position.

24.b5

A better option was 24.bxc5 bxc5 25.f5 when the game is unclear.

24...h5!∓

Highlighting the misplacement of White's knight on g3. Black will proceed with ...h5-h4, followed by ...♗f5 with pressure.

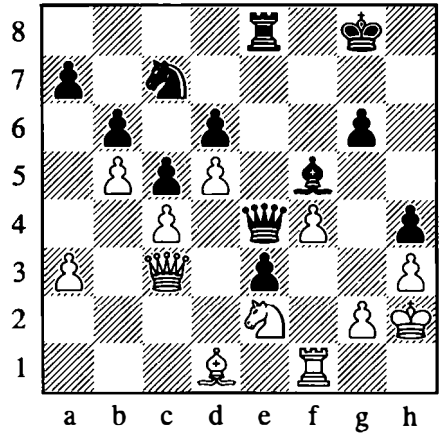
25.♗d1 h4 26.♘e2 ♗f5 27.♗c3?!

A better option was 27.♕b3 e3 28.♗e1 ♗f6∓ when it is not easy for Black to break through White's defence.

27...e3 28.♕b2 ♗xc3 29.♕xc3

Or: 29.♘xc3 ♕f6 30.♗e2 ♕d4∓

29...♕e4!∓



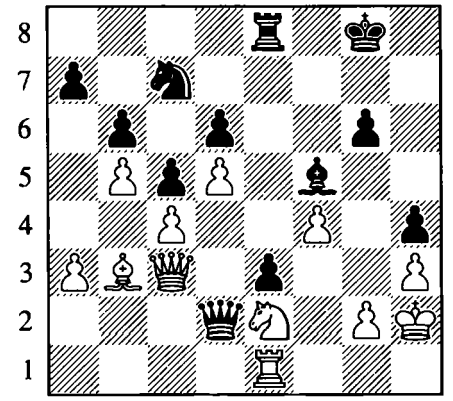
The passed pawn on e3 becomes dangerous while White's pieces are poorly coordinated.

30.♗b3 ♕d3 31.♖e1?!

The decisive mistake in a very bad position.

A better try was: 31.♕xd3 ♗xd3 32.♖e1 ♖e4 33.g3 (33.♘c3 doesn't help: 33...♖xf4 34.♖xe3 ♗xc4–+) 33...♗xc4 34.♘c3 ♖d4 35.♗xc4 ♖xc4 36.♖xe3 ♔f8 Black is practically a pawn up, and should win with good play.

31...♕d2!–+



White is completely tied up and Black finishes the job very nicely.

32.♕c1 ♗d3 33.♘g1 ♕f2 34.♘f3 e2 35.♕b2 ♖e3 36.♕f6 ♘e8!

White's queen has no real threats.

37.♕d8 ♔f8 38.♕xh4 ♖xf3

White finally had to resign.

0–1

Final remarks

1. Black equalized rather easily after trading rooks on the e-file and transferring his remaining rook with 18...♕f8 followed by 19...♖e8. This move was essential in fighting for the key e4-square.
2. And the control of the e4-square did in fact prove essential. As soon as Black occupied this square with 20...♘e4 the game turned around and White had to endure a difficult defence in attempting to hold the position. At this point, White was left without useful plans for the rest of the game.

Yaroslav Zherebukh – Mauricio Flores Rios

Southwest Collegiate, USA 2013

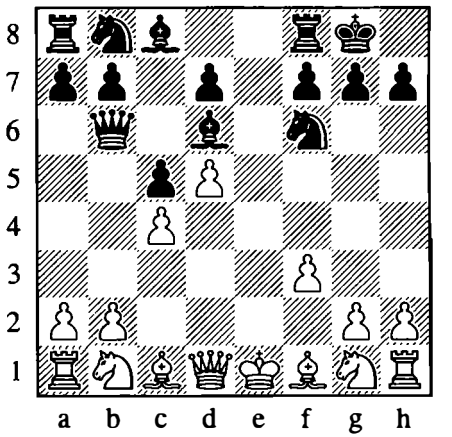
Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of how Black may carry out an effective ...b7-b5 sacrifice, in order to dispute White's control of the game.
2. Something to note is how this sacrifice shifts the attention away from White's positional plans.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5 ♘e4 3.♗f4 c5 4.f3 ♕a5† 5.c3 ♘f6 6.d5 ♕b6 7.♗c1 e6 8.e4 exd5 9.exd5 ♗d6 10.c4

We have reached the thematic structure via a very unusual move order.

10...0–0



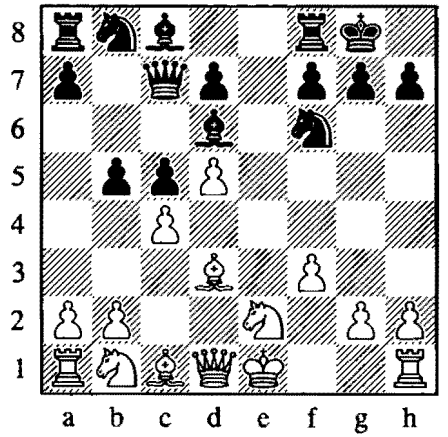
White does not seem to know what he is doing. He has not developed a single piece while Black has already castled. However, he has obtained a symmetric Benoni structure, which often gives White a stable centre and a lasting spatial advantage. I knew that if I allowed White to organize his pieces harmoniously, then I would be inferior despite my lead in development.

11.♗d3 ♕c7 12.♘e2 b5!

I thought breaking on the queenside to undermine White's coordination was my only way to avoid being squeezed as in the previous examples. I believe I was right about this evaluation. This pawn sacrifice manages to divert attention away from White's plans due to the multiple threats.

Instead the bishop is lost after 12...♗xh2? 13.f4.

Natural development will lead Black into an inferior position. For example: 12...♖e8?! 13.♘bc3 a6 (Again 13...♗xh2? leads to trouble, now after 14.♔f1! threatening f3-f4: 14...♗e5 15.♘b5! ♕b6 16.f4 ♗d4 17.♘exd4 cxd4 18.b4!+– Followed by c4-c5 or ♗b2 with an overwhelming centre and kingside attack.) 14.♗g5 ♗e7 15.0–0± White is likely to take over the game as in the previous examples, most likely through a kingside expansion.



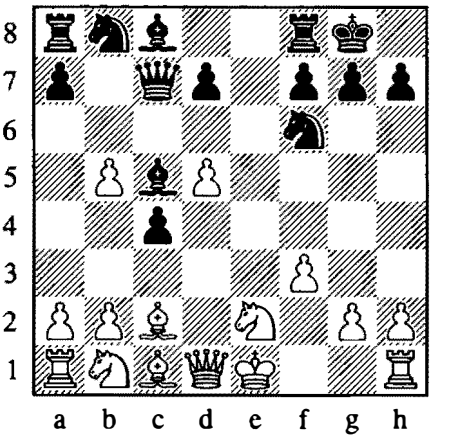
13.cxb5

Accepting the challenge.

Safer was 13.♘a3!? bxc4 14.♘xc4 ♗b7 15.♘c3 ♖e8† 16.♔f1 with an unclear position.

13...c4 14.♗c2 ♗c5

The logical continuation. Black has excellent compensation due to the misplacement of White's king and the weakened d5- and b5-pawns.



15.♘bc3?!

This is a small inaccuracy, as it allows Black to arrange his pieces well with ...d7-d6 followed by ...♘bd7 and ...♖e8.

Somewhat better was: 15.♗g5 ♕e5 16.♕d2 (or 16.♗xf6?! ♕xf6 17.♘bc3 ♖e8 18.♔f1 d6 when White's position is rather delicate, for example 19.♕e1?? ♕xf3†! 20.gxf3 ♗h3#) 16...a6!? (16...♕xb2?? loses to 17.♗xh7†) 17.b6! With a dynamic balance where any result is possible, say after: 17...♘xd5!? 18.♗e4 ♗b7 19.♘bc3 ♘xc3 20.♗xb7 ♘xe2 21.♕xe2 ♕xg5 22.♗xa8 ♗xb6∞

15...d6∓

Now Black is able to arrange his pieces nicely with ...♘bd7, ...♖e8 and ...♗b7 with a very comfortable position.

16.♔f1

The alternative 16.♗g5 is unsafe after 16...♘bd7 17.♕d2 a6! opening lines for a dangerous attack. For example: 18.bxa6 ♗xa6 19.♗e3 ♕b6 20.♘d4 ♖fe8 21.0–0–0 ♖ab8∓

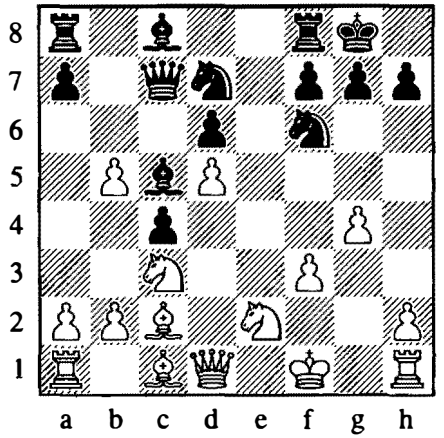
Trading off the annoying bishop with 16.♘a4 ♖e8 17.♘xc5 ♕xc5 leads to an inferior endgame after: 18.♔f1 ♘bd7 19.♕d4 ♘xd5∓

16...♘bd7 17.g4!?

Although White's position is not ideal, the idea g2-g4 is still valid (even necessary) to claim some

space on the kingside, and to connect the rooks with ♔g2.

It is no better to play 17.♘d4 a6 18.bxa6 ♖xa6 when g2-g4 will be needed sooner or later, as White does not have much else to do. For example, 19.♗g5?! ♕b6 20.♘db5 ♖e8 21.♕d2 ♗b7∓ when White lacks a constructive plan and he still has not connected his rooks.



17...♗b7?

A serious imprecision.

Accurate was:

17...♘e5! 18.♔g2 a6 19.bxa6

Instead the optimistic 19.g5? fails due to: 19...♕d7 20.h3 (20.gxf6?? ♕h3#) 20...♘h5 21.♘a4 f6! Bringing the rook into the attack. 22.♘xc5 dxc5 23.♘f4 fxg5! 24.♘xh5 ♘xf3 Black's attack is irresistible.

Also the natural 19.♘g3? runs into: 19...♘fxg4! 20.fxg4 ♗xg4→

19...♖xa6

Now Black has an excellent initiative for the pawn. White must be extra careful, for example:

20.♘g3? ♘fxg4! 21.fxg4 ♗xg4 22.♕d2 ♗f3† 23.♔f1 f5!

Black has a crushing attack.

18.g5 ♘e8 19.f4?!

White gains more space on the kingside, but this move is careless as it allows Black some tactical resources associated with the weakened a8-h1 diagonal.

Correct was 19.♔g2! a6 (19...♘b6? is bad due to 20.a4!± followed by a4-a5-a6) 20.bxa6 ♖xa6∞ when chances are approximately level.

19...♘b6

Black's plan is to create pressure on the d5-pawn.

20.♗e4?!

Logical, but inaccurate.

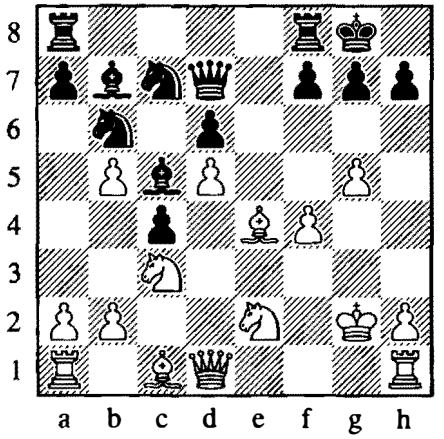
Better was 20.♘g3 since now 20...♕d7 is met by 21.♗f5 with an unclear game.

Instead 20...a6!? allows Black to retain his initiative, say after 21.bxa6 ♖xa6 22.♗e4 ♕d7 23.♔g2 f5! 24.♗f3 ♘c7∓ when the d5-pawn is likely to be lost.

20...♕d7 21.♔g2

During the game I was happy to realize that 21.a4?! with the idea of a4-a5-a6 suppressing Black's counterplay, fails tactically to: 21...♘c7 22.a5? ♘bxd5! The weakening of the long diagonal now becomes evident. 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♗xd5 ♕h3†! The key move. 25.♔e1 ♕h4† 26.♘g3 (26.♔f1?? ♕f2#) 26...♖fe8† 27.♔d2 (27.♔f1?? ♕h3† 28.♗g2 ♗xg2#) 27...♗xd5 And Black is winning.

21...♘c7!∓



It becomes clear that the ...b7-b5 sacrifice has paid off, since the d5-pawn and the a8-h1 diagonal are very weak. Most importantly, White has been unable to arrange his pieces in harmony, as he achieved in the previous examples.

22.♘g3

It is just too late for 22.a4?! due to 22...♖ae8! 23.a5? ♘bxd5! when everything falls apart. For example: 24.♗xd5 ♕g4† 25.♘g3 ♘xd5! 26.♕xg4 ♘xf4† 27.♔f1 ♗g2#

22...♖fe8

With the idea of a potential ...♖xe4 followed by ...♘bxd5 with a strong initiative.

Even stronger was 22...♖ae8!∓ with the additional option of ...f7-f6 opening the f-file.

23.♗f3

23.♖e1? does not help: 23...♘bxd5!–+

Or 23.♖f1 ♘xb5 24.♘xb5 ♕xb5, when the threat of ...♖xe4 remains strong. For example, 25.♕f3 ♖xe4 26.♘xe4 ♗xd5 followed by ...♕c6 and ...♖e8 winning.

An alternative was: 23.♕f3 ♘xb5∓

23...♘xb5?!

I completely missed 23...♗b4! followed by ...♗xc3 and ...♘bxd5, which is simply winning.

24.♘xb5 ♕xb5 25.a4 ♕a5 26.♗d2

If 26.♘f5!? then Black breaks through White's position with: 26...c3!∓

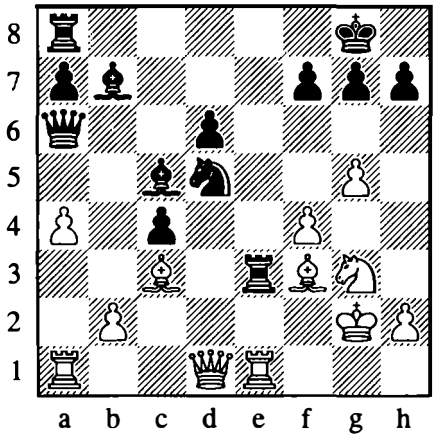
26...♕a6 27.♗c3?

A calculation error in time trouble.

Defending the d5-pawn with 27.♗c1?! does not help because of 27...c3! 28.bxc3 ♕c4 followed by ...♗xd5 with a strong attack.

Accurate was 27.b4! cxb3 28.♕xb3 ♕c4 29.♕xc4 ♘xc4∓ when Black is better, though White has some chances to hold the game.

27...♖e3 28.♖e1 ♘xd5!–+



The key to 28...♘xd5 is that after 29.♗xd5 ♖d3 Black regains the piece with a crushing attack. Black is winning, but the game was eventually drawn as White found good resources in mutual time pressure.

Final remarks

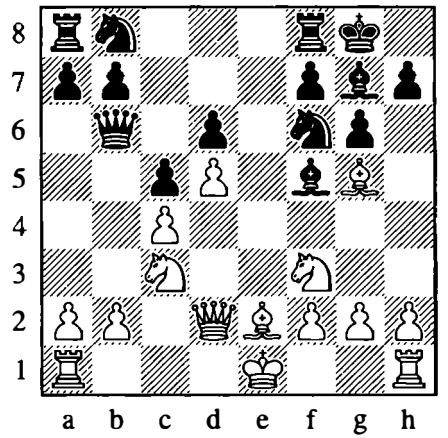
1. White's opening deserves careful examination. If Black had not chosen 8...b5, he would have been left without active plans, and his development lead would have been worthless.
2. Black's ...b7-b5 pawn sacrifice was effective because the d5-pawn immediately became a target and because White's king became vulnerable. Without these factors this sacrifice could have been a failure.
3. It is worth noticing how White never really managed to organize his forces towards anything other than protecting his weaknesses. And everything Black achieved was at the sole cost of a pawn! This means the ...b7-b5 sacrifice is often well justified as long as Black can seize immediate counterplay.

Magnus Carlsen – Loekvan Wely

Wijk aan Zee 2013

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's plan ...♕b6, ...♗f5 and ...♘e4 which creates pressure along the h8-a1 and h7-b1 diagonals in order to capture the b2-pawn.

1.c4 g6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0–0 6.♗g5 c5 7.d5 e6 8.♕d2 exd5 9.exd5 ♕b6 10.♘f3 ♗f5



Black plays in a logical way: he fights for the control of the e4-square, and will continue with ...♘e4 trading a piece to alleviate his space disadvantage.

11.♘h4 ♘e4

Black's only logical continuation.

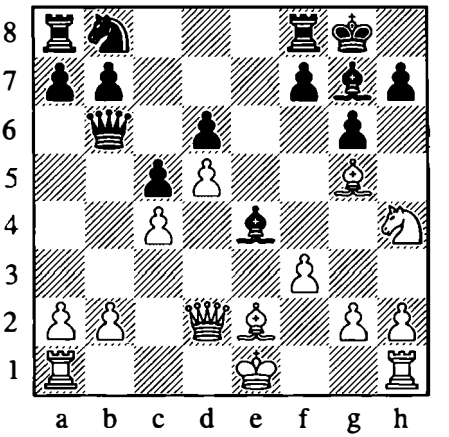
The natural 11...♗g4? runs into the tactical trick: 12.♘xg6! (but not 12.♗xf6? ♗xf6 13.♗xg4 ♗xh4=) 12...hxg6 (12...fxg6 13.♗xf6±) 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗xg4 ♖e8† 15.♗e2 When Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn.

If 11...♗c8?! 12.0–0± White has a stable advantage and may expand on the kingside as in previous examples.

12.♘xe4 ♗xe4

Note how the b2-pawn is lost. This sequence of moves is rather typical in this position, and constitutes one of Black's main lines of counterplay. Was Carlsen unprepared against it? The answer is:

13.f3!



13...♕xb2?

As a King's Indian player I faced this pawn structure rather frequently, and I often got into trouble due to White's kingside expansion. Later, I learned this plan in order to capture the b2-pawn, but to my surprise even those positions posed some problems for Black, and this game is an example. Then the question is: *Why does this happen?* The reason is that in most variations, the weakness of the d6- and b7-pawns is far more important than losing the b2-pawn, and the well-advanced d5-pawn turns the balance in White's favour in most cases.

If 13...♗xb2? 14.♖d1 ♗f5 15.♘xf5 gxf5 16.0–0± Black is a pawn up, but his kingside is in serious danger.

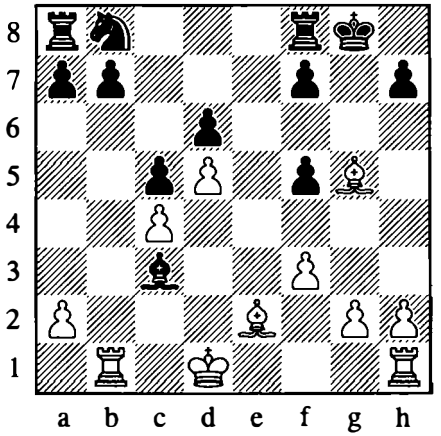
The correct continuation was 13...h6! 14.♗xh6 ♗xh6 15.♕xh6 ♕xb2 16.0–0 ♗c2! when Black maintains equality (but not 16...♕xe2? 17.fxe4 when White's attack is just winning, for example: 17...♕xe4 18.♘f5! gxf5 19.♕g5† ♔h7 20.♖f4 followed by ♖h4).

14.♖c1 ♗f5

14...♗f6 does not help: 15.♕xb2 ♗xb2 16.fxe4 f6 17.♗d2 ♗xc1 18.♗xc1± The two bishops are stronger than the rook and pawn.

Interesting was 14...h6!? diverting White's bishop from the threat ♗e7xd6: 15.♗xh6 ♕xd2† 16.♗xd2 ♗f6! The key to Black's idea (of course 16...♗f5? is just bad after 17.♘xf5 gxf5 18.♗d3+–). 17.g3 ♗xh4 18.gxh4 ♗f5 19.♗f4± But once again, the weakness of the d6-pawn makes White's position preferable.

15.♘xf5 gxf5 16.♕xb2 ♗xb2 17.♖b1 ♗c3† 18.♔d1



Black now faces the difficulty I described above; he must give up either the d6-pawn or the b7-pawn. Unfortunately, he will be much worse in either case.

18...♖e8

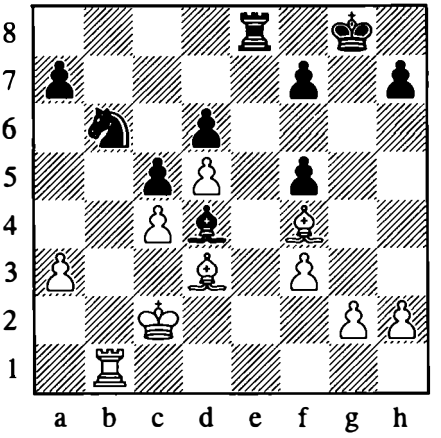
The alternative was: 18...b6 19.♖b3! (the tempting 19.♗e7? fails tactically due to 19...♖e8 20.♗xd6 ♘c6! when the position becomes unclear since 21.dxc6? runs into 21...♖ad8∓) 19...♗d4 (or 19...♗e5?! 20.f4 ♗d4 21.♗e7±) 20.♗e7 ♖e8 21.♗xd6±

19.♖xb7±

Black's weakness on f5 is crippling. White does not have any weaknesses and Carlsen now imposes his advantage brilliantly.

19...♘a6 20.a3 ♖ab8 21.♖xb8 ♘xb8 22.♗d3 ♘d7 23.♔c2 ♗d4 24.♖b1 ♘b6 25.♗f4

And again, the d6-pawn is vulnerable.



25...♗e5 26.♖e1

Interesting was: 26.♗xe5!? ♖xe5 (26...dxe5?! 27.♖b5+–) 27.a4! The key move. 27...♘xa4 28.♖a1 ♘b6 29.♖xa7+– And White will soon capture both the f5- and d6-pawns.

26...♔g7 27.♗g3

Threatening f3-f4 winning the bishop.

27...♖e7 28.f4 ♗f6 29.♖xe7 ♗xe7 30.♗e1 h5 31.g3 ♗f6 32.♔b3 ♔g6 33.h3

Black cannot avoid losing the f5-pawn due to g3-g4. After losing this pawn the endgame is lost, therefore Black resigned. This game is yet another illustration of White's endgame potential in this structure.

1–0

Final remarks

The main message to be remembered from this game is how Black's plan of capturing the b2-pawn can backfire as the b7- and d6-pawns become far more serious targets.

Chapter 14

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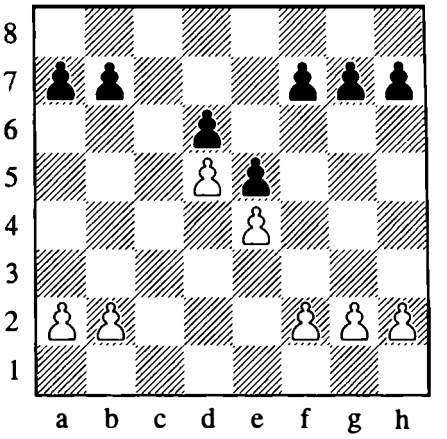


This structure most commonly appears in the King's Indian, the Queen's Indian and the Ruy Lopez. In my own games I often encountered this structure with Black, and I lost many games without really understanding why. For this reason, when writing this book I considered this structure to be one of my main interests and I decided it deserves a separate chapter from other King's Indian positions, as the character of the game is somewhat different.

The difference between this structure and those in the following two chapters is the open c-file. This file plays a major role and Black's ability to stay in the game will depend on whether he knows what to do with it. The questions are:

A) Should Black proceed with a kingside attack regardless of the open c-file?
B) Should he fight for the control of this file?

The problem with Strategy A is that White's forces may penetrate down the c-file, distracting Black from a kingside attack. For example, if White were to place a rook on the seventh rank, it would be difficult for Black's kingside play to continue making progress.

The problem with Strategy B is that White's spatial advantage often guarantees control of the c-file in the long run. White has more space thanks to his central chain e4-d5. If the position is not too simplified then this space translates into being able to manoeuvre more easily. In such cases, although Black may control the c-file at an early stage, it will be White who will ultimately profit from it, or from queenside play in general. This is not to say Black's queenside attempts are always doomed, but the reader should understand that Black's spatial disadvantage and White's lack of weaknesses will make it difficult for Black to gain an advantage from queenside play alone.

Despite these difficulties, I believe approaches A and B are both valid given the right circumstances. Ideally, they could even be combined, though this is hard to accomplish in practice. Now, let's discuss specific plans for each side.

White's plans

1. If Black controls the c-file, the main task is to cover Black's entry points (especially c2), and then manoeuvre to fight for the control of this file.
2. If White possesses the c-file, then prepare a seventh-rank invasion which is likely to capture the b7-pawn.
3. Expand on the queenside with a2-a4-a5 to gain space, limit Black's mobility and create potentially strong passed pawns once Black's queenside pawns are captured.

4. If Black plays ...b7-b5, then break with a2-a4, and even the manoeuvre ♘b4-c6 deserves consideration.

Black's plans

1. If entry points are available, or if White's c-file is vulnerable, then double rooks on the c-file, and possibly invade the seventh rank by placing a rook on c2. This is ideal, but hard to achieve.
2. Create kingside counterplay with ...f7-f5xe4 to open the f-file. This can be followed by ...♗g7-f6-g5 to create kingside threats, and possibly ...h7-h5-h4-h3.
3. If White's play is particularly slow, then ...f7-f5, followed by ...f5-f4 and ...g6-g5-g4 might work.
4. Transfer the dark-squared bishop from g7 to b6 via f6-d8.

The reader should pay close attention to Black's Plans 2 and 3. As stated above, White can easily create diversions on the c-file, preventing Black from focusing on the kingside. This means Black's kingside play should give priority to speed. For this reason, the typical plan ...f7-f5-f4 followed by ...g6-g5-g4 could be too slow, and Black's Plan 2 is more likely to yield results. Black's Plan 3 would only work well if White's queenside play was *really slow*.

Examples 1 and 2 of this chapter will illustrate how White gains control of the queenside (and the c-file) despite Black's seemingly being in control at an earlier stage. Then, Example 3 illustrates White's excellent winning chances in the endgame. The reader should notice the similarity between this endgame and those endgames studied in Chapter 11. After Example 3 a fragment of a game illustrates Black's dream position in this structure, and later we see two more realistic examples of Black's play. The first of these showcases Black's kingside counterplay with ...f7-f5 while the second illustrates Black's queenside opportunities once some pieces come off the board. We also see Black's Plan 4 put in practice to yield excellent results.

Magnus Carlsen – Luke McShane

London Classic 2009

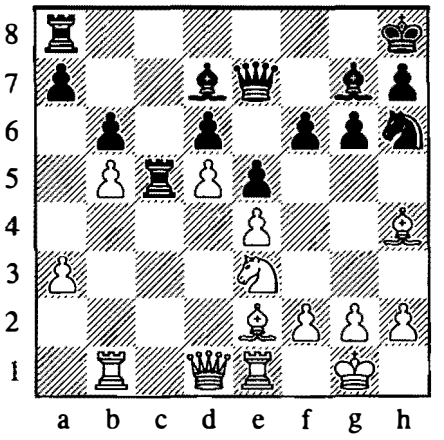
Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's inability to create counterplay despite initially having control of the c-file.

The first twenty moves of this game are irrelevant to this chapter, hence I leave them without comment.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘a6 8.♖e1 ♕e8 9.♗f1 c6 10.♖b1 ♗g4 11.d5 c5 12.♗e2 ♔h8 13.a3 ♗d7 14.b4 b6 15.♗g5 ♘g8 16.♘b5 f6 17.♗h4 ♕e7 18.♘d2 ♘h6 19.♘f1 ♖fc8 20.♘e3 ♘c7 21.bxc5 ♘xb5

An interesting alternative was 21...bxc5!?± and this structure is studied in the next chapter.

22.cxb5 ♖xc5



We have reached the position of interest. The reader should examine this position very carefully and try to make an assessment of it. After analyzing this game, I would advise the reader to contrast his initial opinion and his final opinion. I imagine it might be quite different. In his analysis of this game, McShane wonders if going into this position (with 21...♘xb5) was the right decision. His original evaluation indicated

that he would have sufficient counterplay with his rooks on the c-file, but as he points out, there are no entry points. This is a phenomenon which I have observed far too many times in my own experience, and in those games I have analyzed. Black's position is reasonably good in appearance, but the truth is that it is very difficult to find counterplay, and although it is Black who is temporarily in control of the only open file, only White can really benefit from queenside play, as we will see in this game.

23.f3!±

A simple move that should be remembered. It provides extra support to the chain e4-d5, and it allows the bishop to come back to f2 in order to press against Black's queenside.

As McShane points out, 23.a4? is a serious imprecision, since after 23...g5 24.♗g3 f5 White is forced to destroy his "glorious" e4-d5 chain with 25.exf5 (but not 25.f3? f4) 25...♘xf5. Now the d5-pawn has been weakened, while the bishop on g3 is temporarily useless. A possible continuation is 26.♖c1 ♖xc1 27.♕xc1 ♖c8 28.♕d2 ♖c5 with level chances.

23...♖ac8 24.♗d3

Something to note is how White can improve slowly, while Black can't. The move 24.♗d3 clears e2 for the queen, prepares against ...f6-f5, and gives extra protection to the c2-square. Meanwhile, Black controls the c-file, but cannot do much with it.

Less accurate is 24.♗f2 since Black immediately gains counterplay with 24...f5!. A possible continuation is 25.♗d3 fxe4 26.fxe4 ♗f6 27.a4 ♗g5 and Black is closer to equality than in the game.

24...♕f8

There is nothing better than spending a tempo to prepare ...f6-f5. White was planning to follow with a3-a4, ♕e2, ♘c4 and only then bring his bishop back to f2. Black cannot afford to wait with his queen on e7, as ...f6-f5 is his only constructive plan.

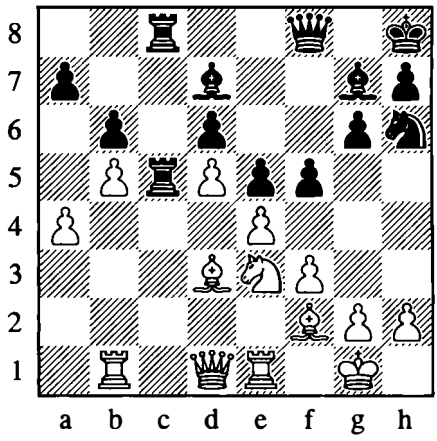
Attempting to "use" the c-file with 24...♖c3 does not really go anywhere after 25.a4 when White can continue with his plans, ignoring the rook on c3 (but not 25.♖b3?! since trading pieces alleviates Black's space problems) and Black cannot insist with 25...♖a3? since the rook gets trapped after: 26.♘c4 ♖c3 (or 26...♖a2 27.♕b3+–) 27.♖b4+– Followed by ♕d2.

25.♗f2

There is nothing else to do on h4, so the bishop comes to f2, aiming at the queenside.

25...f5 26.a4

Getting ready to create a weakness in Black's camp with a4-a5.



26...♖5c7

Black is not ready to close the position with 26...f4? as White continues with the typical manoeuvre 27.♘c2 ♖5c7 28.♘b4 followed by ♘c6 with a near-winning position. For example: 28...g5 29.h3 (preventing ...g5-g4) 29...♘g8 30.♘c6 h5 31.a5 g4 32.axb6 axb6 33.♗xb6 ♖b7 34.♗a7! Followed by b5-b6 and ♗a6 winning, while Black's kingside attack is not getting anywhere; and if 34...♗xc6?! 35.dxc6 ♖xa7 36.b6 and the passed pawns decide the game.

27.h3

This prophylactic move protects the g4-square, and prepares against a future ...f5-f4 followed by ...g6-g5-g4.

If 27.♘c2, to follow with ♘b4-c6, then McShane was ready establish contact on the kingside with 27...g5 28.♘b4 g4 with counterplay.

27...♗f6 28.♕d2

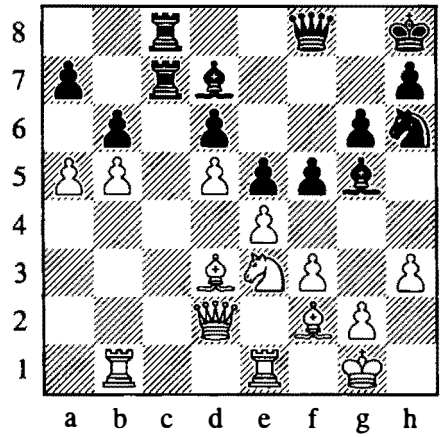
Preparing a4-a5 to create a weakness on the queenside.

If 28.♘c2 McShane intended to gain counterplay with 28...fxe4 29.fxe4 g5 followed by ...g5-g4 with reasonable fighting chances. For example: 30.g4 (or 30.♕d2 g4 31.♗e3 ♘g8 32.hxg4 ♗xg4 with counterplay; but not 30.♕e2?! g4 31.h4 g3! 32.♗xg3 ♕g7 33.♗f2 ♖g8 with excellent compensation for the pawn) 30...♘g8 31.♘b4 ♘e7 32.♘c6 ♘g6 33.a5 ♘f4 34.♗f1 h5 With sharp tactical complications.

28...♗g5

If 28...f4?! 29.♘c2 g5 30.♘b4 ♘f7 31.a5!± and White's attack arrives faster.

29.a5



Black must make a difficult decision between having a weak pawn on b6, or a weak pawn on a7.

29...fxe4?!

It was preferable to play 29...bxa5 30.♕xa5 (30.♖a1!?± is safer) when Black's position requires precision, but is quite playable. For example: 30...♕f6 31.♘c4!? (threatening ♗xa7) 31...fxe4 (but not 31...♖xc4? 32.♗xc4 ♖xc4 33.♕xa7 and the passed b-pawn decides the game) 32.fxe4 ♗f4! And the position is very far from clear since 33.♗xa7? is refuted by 33...♗xh3! with a winning attack.

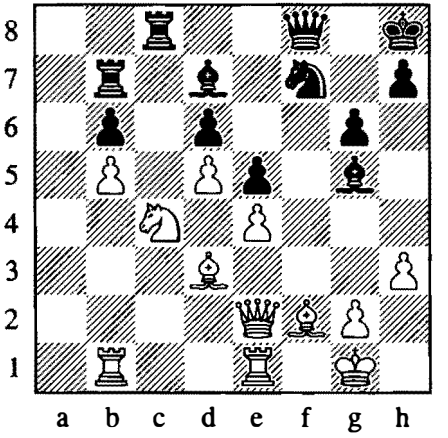
30.fxe4?!

Better was 30.axb6! forcing a weakness on b6, rather than a7; 30...axb6 31.fxe4± is similar to the game.

30...♘f7?!

Once again allowing White to create a weakness on b6. The correct way was 30...bxa5 31.♕xa5 ♗f4± with a playable position for Black.

31.axb6 axb6 32.♕e2 ♖b7 33.♘c4±



And as I said ten moves ago, only White is going to benefit from queenside play. The weakness on b6 is crippling, and prevents Black from creating further threats on the kingside. The battle is strategically won; now let's see how Carlsen utilizes his advantage.

33...♕d8 34.♖f1 ♔g7 35.♔h1

Again, White can slowly improve his position, while Black's pieces are cramped and have little to do.

As McShane points out, 35.♗xb6? gives away most of the advantage after: 35...♖xb6 36.♕f2 (or 36.♖xf7† ♔xf7 37.♕f2† ♔g7 38.♘xb6 ♗h4! 39.g3 [39.♕e3 ♗g5 40.♕f2 ♗h4=] 39...♗xg3 40.♕xg3 ♕xb6† with a drawn position) 36...♖xb5 37.♕xf7† ♔h6±

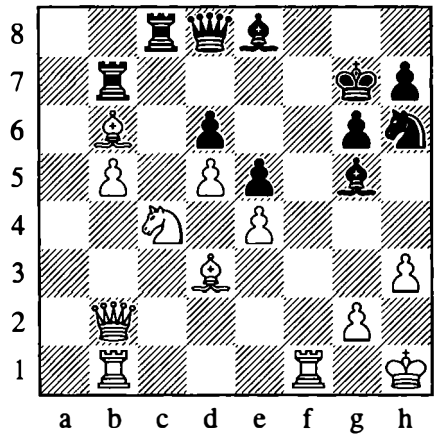
35...♗e8 36.♕b2 ♘h6?

And as usually happens, passive defence leads to mistakes.

A better defence was 36...♖a8 37.♖a1!? ♖xa1 38.♖xa1 ♗h4 39.♗g1 ♕b8 40.♖a6 ♗d8 41.♗e3± when Black's position is extremely difficult to hold.

Black missed the tactical shot:

37.♗xb6!



37...♕e7!

The only move to stay in the game.

Weak is: 37...♕d7? 38.♘xe5! dxe5 39.♕xe5† ♔g8 40.♗d4+–

Black loses by force after: 37...♖xb6 38.♕f2! (threatening ♕f8# as well as ♘xb6) 38...♗xb5 (38...♖xb5?? 39.♕f8#) 39.♘xb6! ♗xd3 40.♘xc8 ♗xf1 41.♕a7†! ♔h8 42.♖b8 With a winning attack, for example: 42...♘g8 (42...♗d3? 43.♘xd6) 43.♖b7 ♘f6 44.♘b6 Followed by ♖b8.

38.♕f2?!

We are close to the time control on move 40, and Carlsen makes some imprecisions.

The most accurate was 38.♗a5! ♗xb5 (or 38...♖xb5 39.♗b4 ♖d8 40.♘xd6!+–) 39.♘xd6 ♕xd6 40.♗xb5 with a near-winning position.

38...♖cb8 39.♖b3 ♘g8

Aiming for ...♘f6-h5 with some counterplay.

40.♗e2

Covering the h5-square.

40...♘f6

And we have passed the time control.

41.♗f3 ♖xb6

This is an interesting practical resource, but Carlsen manages to find a beautiful way to refute it.

The alternative McShane suggests is 41...♘d7 42.♗a7 ♖a8 43.b6 ♘c5 44.♖bb1 h5 45.♘a5 ♖bxa7 46.bxa7 ♕xa7 47.♘c4 ♕c7 when Black's defence is hard to break.

42.♘xb6 ♕c7 43.h4 ♗h6

The knight on f6 is now defenceless.

44.♘a4!

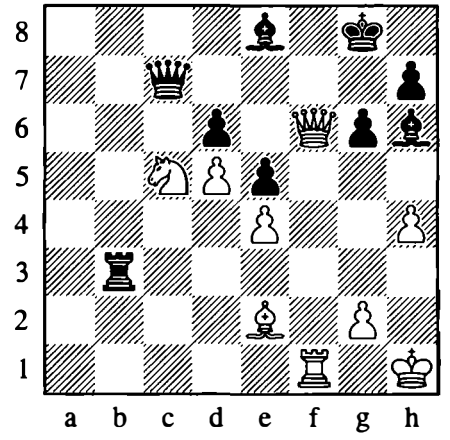
Threatening 45.♘c3, forcing Black to capture.

44...♖xb5

But now:

45.♗e2! ♖xb3 46.♕xf6† ♔g8 47.♘c5!

This is the key to White's last four moves: the knight is immune, and Black's position is near collapse due to the threats ♘e6 and ♗g4-e6.



47...♖g3

Making things easier for White.

If 47...dxc5?? 48.d6 ♕f7 (or 48...♕d7 49.♗c4†) 49.d7! ♕xd7 50.♗c4† with forced mate.

Or: 47...♕xc5?? 48.♕e6† ♔g7 49.♕e7† ♔g8 50.♕xe8† ♔g7 51.♕f8#

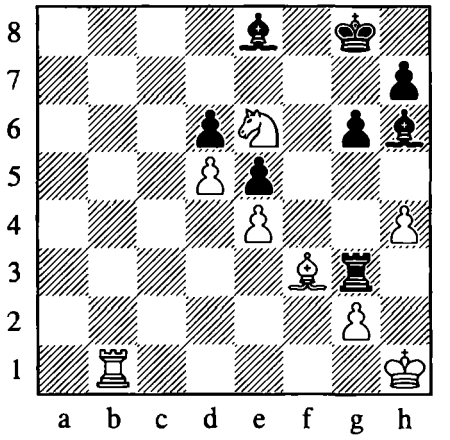
The best defence was 47...♖b2 but after the forcing sequence 48.♗g4 ♗g7 49.♘e6 ♕f7 50.♘xg7 ♕xf6 51.♖xf6 ♔xg7 52.♖xd6 the endgame should be winning for White.

48.♘e6 ♕f7 49.♕xf7† ♗xf7 50.♖b1! ♗e8

Suicidal is 50...♗xe6? 51.dxe6 when the threat is ♖b8 followed by e6-e7-e8=♕: 51...♗f8 52.♖b8 ♔g7 53.♖b7† ♔f6 (or 53...♔g8 54.e7+–) 54.♖f7†+–

51.♗f3+–

Black cannot defend without the help of his trapped rook, thus his position is lost. The rest of the game is interesting, but irrelevant to our chapter, so I give it without further comments. The reader may find some interesting annotations (by McShane) to the rest of this game in *Chessbase Magazine*.



51...♔f7 52.♖b7† ♔f6 53.♖xh7 ♗f4 54.♘xf4 exf4 55.e5† dxe5 56.d6 e4 57.♗xe4 ♖e3 58.♗d5! ♔f5 59.♔h2 ♖e5 60.♗f3 ♔f6 61.d7 1–0

Final remarks

1. The option 21...bxc5 deserves serious consideration and the reader should study it carefully in the next chapter.
2. Although Black controlled the c-file, he was unable to use it. White was able to gradually gain control of the queenside thanks to his spatial advantage.
3. Since Black had nothing to gain on the queenside, all attention should be directed to kingside play. The break ...f6-f5 was absolutely necessary, and unlike many other King's Indian positions, advancing ...f5-f4 was not always a good idea. In fact, on moves 26-29 it would have been a poor decision since this would slow down the creation of kingside threats, while White can create a strong queenside attack very quickly. In general, White's queenside play can distract Black's forces rather easily once the c-file is open.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Dariusz Swiercz

Warsaw 2011

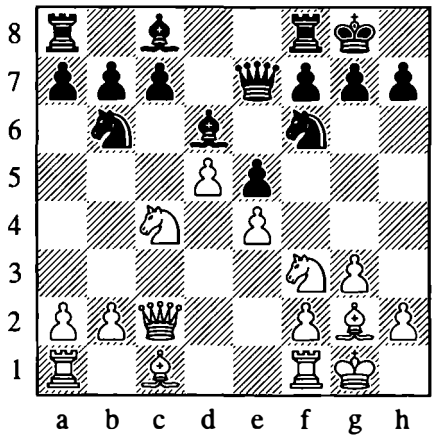
Learning objective: This game reinforces the idea that White is ultimately the one who can gain control of the c-file, despite Black having extra moves. In particular, the reader should notice Black's lack of targets.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗b4† 5.♘d2 0–0 6.♘gf3 dxc4 7.♕c2 ♘c6 8.♕xc4 ♗d6?!

This opening imprecision allows White to gain a firm control of the centre.

Better was 8...♕d5 9.0–0 ♗xd2 10.♕xd5 exd5 11.♗xd2 ♖e8 12.e3 ♗f5 with reasonable chances for Black.

9.0–0 ♕e7 10.e4 e5 11.d5 ♘b8 12.♕c2 ♘bd7 13.♘c4 ♘b6



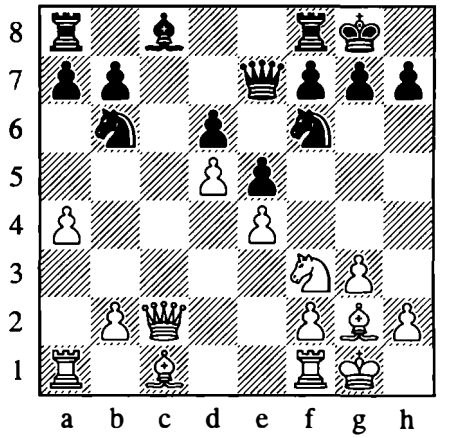
We have reached an interesting position. White has a notable advantage because of his good control of the centre, and the backward c7-pawn, but how shall he take advantage of these factors? The answer is the rather paradoxical but strong:

14.♘xd6! cxd6

And the resulting position is the beginning of our study. We have reached the structure of this chapter, and this is the moment to assess the position. At first sight it might seem that Black is doing completely fine, as he may soon start to fight for the c-file with ...♗d7 and ...♖ac8. Moreover, Black's dark-squared bishop (the bad bishop) has already been traded so he should have nothing to worry about. Unfortunately for Black, reality is not so simple. The biggest problem is that, as in the previous game, White has a significant space advantage due to the favourable e4-d5 vs e5-d6 chain. Despite Black's temporary activity, White will be able to reorganize his pieces more efficiently and emerge with a dominating position.

15.a4!

A good continuation, to proceed with a4-a5 gaining space.



15...♗g4

If 15...a5 preventing a4-a5, the weird-looking 16.♘h4!? prevents ♗g4xf3 thus putting Black in a difficult position as he cannot develop his bishop. 16...♕d8 (but not 16...♗d7? 17.♕b3! winning a pawn, or 16...♗g4? 17.f3! ♗h5 18.♕b3 ♘c8 19.♘f5 ♕c7 20.♗d2 followed with ♖ac1 with domination) 17.b3 ♗d7 18.♗a3 ♘c8 19.♖fc1± Black's forces are against the wall due to their lack of space.

If 15...♗d7 then 16.b3 ♖ac8 17.♕d3± gives White a promising advantage due to his extra space and the weak d6-pawn.

16.♘d2!?

This is an interesting approach. Wojtaszek begins the knight transfer to c4 immediately, as he knows Black's pieces do not have targets to attack.

A worthy option was 16.a5 ♘bd7 (or 16...♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♘bd7 18.b4± when White's bishops are very strong despite the closed nature of the position) 17.b4± with a significant space advantage.

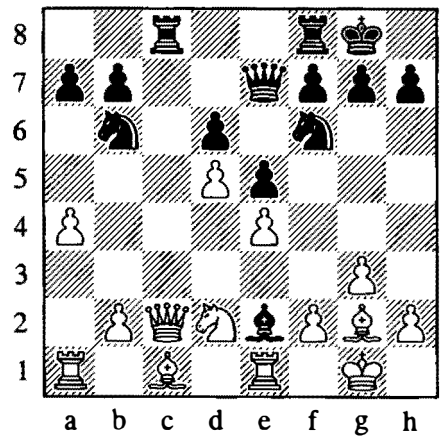
16...♗e2

Black is simply "hitting the air".

If 16...♖ac8 17.♕d3 White has a very pleasing advantage. An illustrative continuation is 17...♕d7 18.b3 ♗h3 19.a5 ♘a8 20.♘c4 ♘c7 21.f4!± with a strong positional advantage.

Another option was 16...♖fc8 17.♕d3 ♘bd7 18.♕e3 and Black really has nothing to aim for. 18...a5 19.b3 ♘c5 20.♘c4 ♕c7 21.♗a3 b6 22.♖ac1± and Black has no good counterplay against the positional threat of f2-f4.

17.♖e1 ♖ac8



Black really does seem to have some initiative, but this is only a facade.

18.♕b1

The queen is awkwardly placed, but this is only temporary.

18...♗h5

The bishop becomes an easy target after 18...♗a6? 19.b4! threatening b4-b5. 19...♗c4 20.♗h3 ♖c7 21.♖a3 Threatening ♖c3 followed by a4-a5, and after 21...♘fd7 22.♖c3 ♖fc8 23.a5 ♘a8 24.♘xc4 ♖xc4 25.♖xc4 ♖xc4 26.♗e3 White has a winning positional advantage; this is very similar to Polugaevsky – Ivkov from Chapter 11.

Or 18...♗c4? 19.b3 ♗a6 20.b4 transposing into the variation above.

19.a5 ♘bd7

Black's pieces slowly go back to their passive positions.

19...♘c4 20.♘f1!? White keeps as many pieces on the board as possible, while threatening b2-b3 trapping the knight (also possible is 20.♕d3 ♘xd2 21.♗xd2 with excellent chances for White). 20...b6 21.axb6 ♘xb6 (even worse is 21...axb6 22.b3 ♘a5 23.♗e3±) 22.♕d3 ♖c7 23.♘e3± Black has many weaknesses and there is no semblance of counterplay.

20.b4

Covering the c5-square, and gaining more space.

20...♗g6 21.♕d3

The queen is back on the board, and it becomes clear that Black did not accomplish anything during the last five moves.

21...♘h5

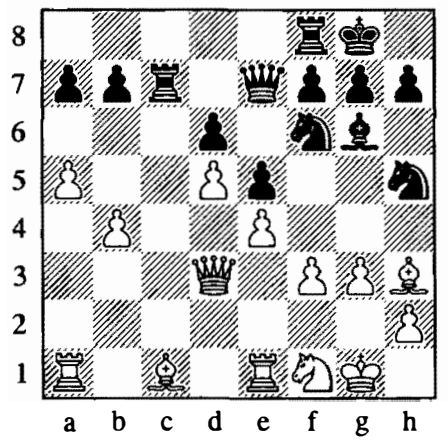
Attempting to create counterplay with the usual ...f7-f5.

22.♗h3

A good decision, preventing Black's counterplay and taking control of an important diagonal.

Incorrect was 22.♘f1 due to 22...f5! 23.f3± when White preserves an advantage, but at least Black can aim for activity on the f-file.

22...♖c7 23.♘f1 ♘df6 24.f3±



Note how the bishop on h3 prevents Black from doubling his rooks on the c-file. His position is already hopeless.

24...h6 25.♘e3 ♘h7 26.♗d2 ♘g5 27.♗g2 ♕d7 28.♖ac1 ♖xc1

Fighting for the c-file with 28...♖fc8 can be met by 29.♖xc7 ♖xc7 30.b5!? gaining more space on the queenside, preparing ♗b4 or b5-b6 or a5-a6, with a huge advantage.

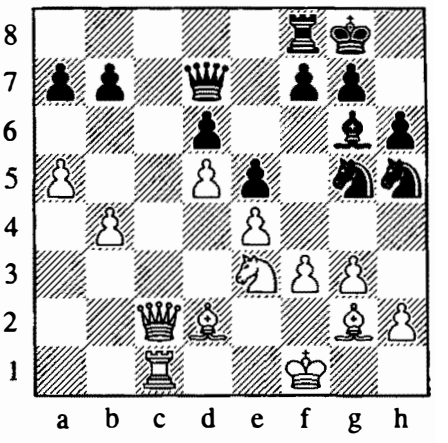
29.♖xc1 ♘h3†

Instead 29...♖c8? loses on the spot to 30.♖xc8† ♕xc8 31.♘c4 ♕c7 32.f4! when Black is losing a piece after 32...♘h7 33.f5.

30.♔f1 ♘g5

Again 30...♖c8 runs into a nice tactical refutation: 31.♖xc8† ♕xc8 32.♕c4! ♕d7 (or 32...♕xc4† 33.♘xc4 ♘g5 34.♘xd6+–) 33.a6! bxa6 34.♕c6! When the knight on h3 is hanging and 34...♕xc6? fails to 35.dxc6 ♘g5 36.c7.

31.♕c2+–



White has gained undisputed control of the c-file, and Black still has no counterplay; the rest is easy.

31...a6 32.♔e1 ♕b5 33.♕c4 ♕a4 34.h4 ♘xe4

A desperate hope for counterplay.

Or 34...♘h7 35.♔f2 followed by ♕c7 taking the queenside pawns and winning.

35.fxe4 ♘xg3 36.♔f2 ♘h5 37.b5!

Offering to trade queens to clarify the position.

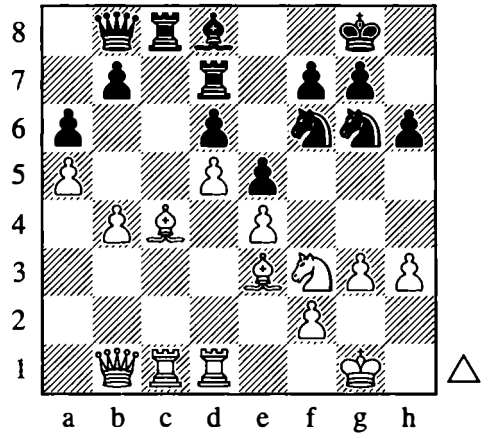
37...♕a3 38.♗b4 ♕b2† 39.♖c2 ♕b1 40.♗xd6 1–0

Final remarks

1. White's decision to modify the structure with 14.♘xd6 was fully justified. Wojtaszek was able to see into the future of the game and realize that the c-file would ultimately belong to White, while Black would not be able to gain any counterplay.
2. A key move for White was 22.♗h3, preventing Black's counterplay with ...f7-f5. After this move Black falls into a passive and rather desperate position.
3. The reader should see a close similarity between this position and the games Polugaevsky – Ivkov and Smeets – Tiviakov from Chapter 11, in which White inevitably gains control of the c-file due to his spatial advantage.

White's endgame prospects

If White manages to expand on the queenside with a2-a4-a5 or something similar, then even after trading all major pieces and some minor pieces, he should have excellent winning chances due to his spatial edge. The following fragment is an example.



The game **Beliavsky – Carlhammar**, Gibraltar 2009, reached the position in the diagram. White has expanded on the queenside already, securing a significant spatial advantage, and now after:

23.♗f1!?

White is willing to simplify the position to head for an endgame he considers to be winning.

White could have also fought for the c-file after: 23.♕d3 ♖dc7 24.♖c2 ♘d7 25.♖dc1± When Black needs high precision to stay in the game. For example, 25...♘e7? (better was 25...♘gf8) loses due to: 26.♗b6! ♘xb6 27.axb6 ♖d7 28.♗b5! And after 28...♖xc2 29.♖xc2 axb5 30.♕xb5 the rook on d7 is hanging, and there is nothing better than 30...♘c6 31.dxc6 bxc6 32.♖xc6.

23...♖dc7 24.♘d2 ♖xc1

If 24...b5 White is much better after 25.axb6! ♖xc1 26.♖xc1 ♖xc1 27.♕xc1 ♗xb6 28.♗xb6 ♕xb6 29.♕b2!? since the weak a6-pawn will be a problem sooner or later.

25.♖xc1 ♖xc1 26.♕xc1 ♕c7 27.♕xc7 ♗xc7

Trading pieces is supposed to alleviate Black's spatial problem, but here this will not be enough.

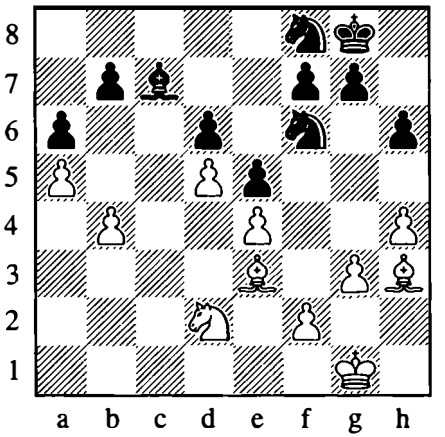
28.h4!

Threatening the decisive ♗h3-c8 attacking the b7-pawn.

28...♘f8

A better defence was 28...♔f8 though after 29.♗h3 ♘e7 30.♔g2 ♔e8 31.♔f3 ♔d8 32.♘c4 ♘d7 33.g4!? White will expand on the kingside with excellent winning chances.

29.♗h3



29...♘8d7

29...♘6d7 does not help: 30.♘c4 f6 (or 30...♔h7 31.♗b6! ♘xb6 [31...♗xb6 32.axb6+–] 32.axb6 ♗b8 33.♗c8+–) 31.h5! Fixing another weakness. 31...♔f7 32.♔g2 ♔e7 33.♗f5 ♔f7 And now White has many winning methods, such as 34.♗b6! ♗b8 35.♘e3 ♔e7 36.♗e6! ♘xe6 37.♘f5† ♔f7 38.dxe6† ♔xe6 39.♘xg7† ♔f7 40.♘f5 followed by ♘xh6.

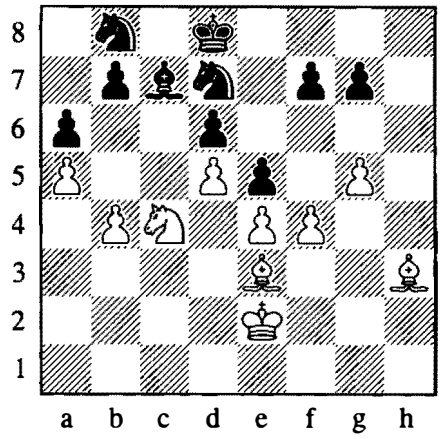
30.g4!

Gaining even more space.

30...♘b8 31.g5 hxg5 32.hxg5 ♘fd7 33.♘c4 ♔f8 34.♔f1 ♔e7 35.♔e2 ♔d8 36.f4!+–

The decisive break. Black will be unable to resist the opening of more lines due to his poor

piece placement, his weaknesses and his lack of space.



36...f6

White is also winning after 36...exf4 37.♗xf4 ♔e7 38.♗e3 ♔d8 39.♗d4 g6 40.♔f3 ♔e7 41.♔f4 with the threat of e4-e5. Black will fall into zugzwang sooner or later.

37.♔f3 ♘f8

Or 37...fxg5 38.fxe5 ♘xe5† 39.♘xe5 dxe5 40.♗xg5† ♔e8 41.♗c8 and wins.

38.gxf6 gxf6 39.fxe5 fxe5 40.♗g5† ♔e8 41.♗c8

And the b7-pawn is finally lost.

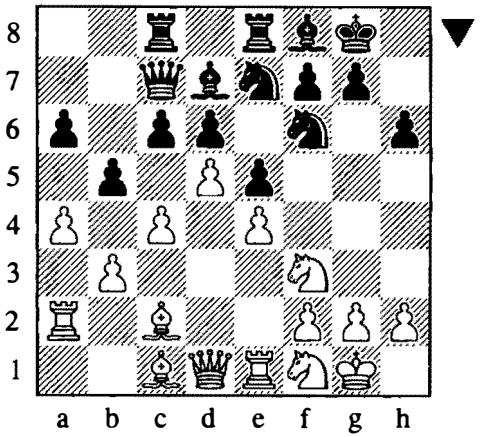
41...♘fd7 42.♗xb7
1–0

Final remarks

1. I would like to emphasize that White's plan of trading rooks and queens with 23.♗f1 was not the only way to proceed. The endgame was far superior, but victory was not completely guaranteed.
2. It would have been interesting for White to first press in the middlegame a little longer with 23.♕d3, as I believe Black did not really have the resources to maintain control of the c-file had White found the right continuation.

How should Black play?

White's previous three wins were very convincing, and the reader may wonder how Black is supposed to play. I want to answer this question by first showing a short fragment from the game **Bouaziz – Beliavsky**, Szirak 1987.



After a Ruy Lopez opening, the game reached the position in the diagram, and now Black turned into the structure we are studying with:

17...cxd5 18.cxd5

And now:

18...♘g6!

This is a good move for two reasons. Black will improve his least-useful piece by playing ...♗e7-d8-b6 while the knight on g6 is ready to jump to f4. Note how difficult it is for White to cover all the knight jumps when Black's knights are on f6 and g6; it seems like Black always has something useful to do.

A different continuation, such as 18...bxa4 19.bxa4 ♖b8 20.♕e2 a5 21.♘e3 ♘g6 22.g3 ♖ec8 23.♗d2±, gives White a dominating position after ♗d3 and ♘c4. Once again Black lacks queenside targets.

19.axb5 axb5 20.♗d2 ♗e7 21.♕a1

If 21.♗d3 ♘f4!? (21...♗d8 might be too slow, and after 22.g3 ♕b8 23.♕e2 ♗b6 24.♘e3 White

secures a stable position with prospects for an advantage) Black has good counterplay after 22.♗xf4 exf4 23.♕d2 ♕c3! with a dynamic balance.

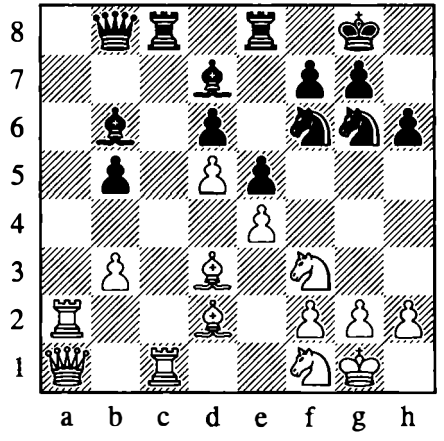
21.g3!? deserves attention too.

21...♗d8 22.♖c1 ♕b8 23.♗d3

Of course 23.♖a7? simply cooperates with Black, and after 23...♗b6 24.♖a2 ♗g4 25.♘e1 ♘f4!∓ Black has serious kingside threats.

23...♗b6

It took five moves to bring this bishop from the useless f8-square to the powerful b6-square; it was worth it. This bishop covers the entry points a7 and c7, and exerts pressure against White's kingside.



24.♖xc8

Black is at least equal after 24.♗e3 ♖xc1 25.♕xc1 ♖c8 26.♕a1 ♘f4 27.♗xf4 exf4.

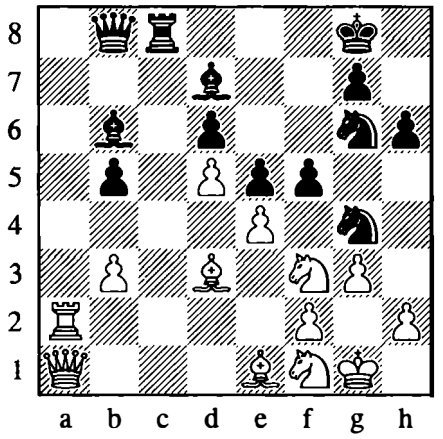
24...♖xc8 25.g3?!

Better is 25.h3 ♘h5 26.♘e3 ♘gf4 27.♗f1 with a level game.

25...♘g4 26.♗e1?!

White is only slightly worse after: 26.♘e3 ♘xe3 27.♗xe3 ♗xe3 28.fxe3 ♗g4!?

26...f5!∓



Black's dreams come true. Now he is able to undermine White's central pawn structure without having to lose control of the open file on the queenside. I should say White did not play well enough, and in practice Black will rarely be able to accomplish such an ideal position. Nevertheless, it is good for the reader to know what to hope for. Black had a significant advantage after:

27.exf5 ♘e7 28.♘h4 ♘xd5 29.♘g6 ♘gf6 30.♕d1 ♕b7 31.g4 ♗e8 32.♘g3 ♘f4!∓

The rest of the game is irrelevant to our purposes.

Final remarks

1. It should be noted that, unlike the previous three examples, Black transferred into this pawn structure under good conditions.
2. The conditions were good because there was time for the plan ...♗e7-d8-b6 to be executed, and because Black's knights were well placed on f6 and g6. In addition, White was not in time to claim queenside space with a2-a4-a5.

The following two games are more recent and much more realistic executions of Black's plans.

Ruslan Ponomariov – Teimour Radjabov

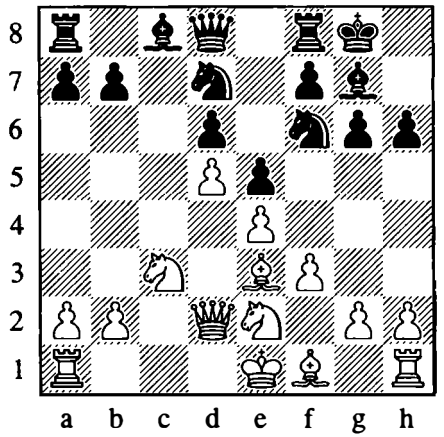
Medias 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates Black's chances for kingside play based on the ...f7-f5 break.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0–0 6.♘ge2 e5 7.♗g5 c6 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.d5 h6 10.♗e3

The pawn is immune as 10.♗xh6 is met by 10...♘xe4! 11.♘xe4 ♕h4† 12.g3 ♕xh6 13.♕xh6 ♗xh6 with approximately level chances.

10...cxd5 11.cxd5



We have reached the position of interest. The two earlier games should have been enough to convince the reader that White's spatial advantage is quite promising. Black needs to find a concrete way to react or he will be dominated as in the earlier examples.

11...a6

If Black plays 11...♘e8, attempting to create counterplay immediately with ...f7-f5, then 12.0–0–0!? gives a promising position after 12...♔h7 13.h4 ♘c5 14.h5 g5 15.g4± when White had a huge positional advantage in Zaja – Zufic, Bosnia 2011.

12.♘c1

If 12.0–0–0 h5 (12...b5!?) 13.♔b1 b5 and Black will have sufficient counterplay on the queenside.

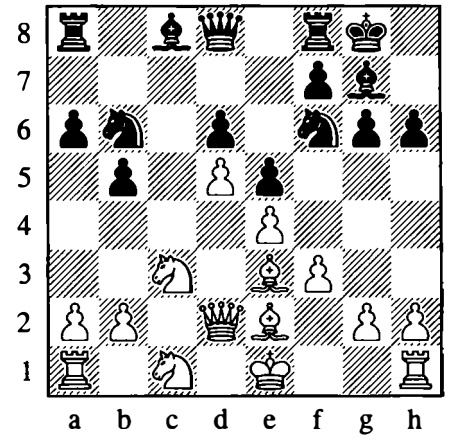
Again 12.♗xh6 is met by 12...♘xe4!.

12...b5

This is a double-edged decision; it gains some space on the queenside, but it weakens the c6-square.

I would have preferred 12...♔h7!? 13.♗e2 ♘e8 14.0–0 f5 with a playable position for Black.

13.♗e2 ♘b6



14.0–0

White has decided to castle kingside, and Black has no time to lose – he must play ...f7-f5 as soon as possible.

14...♔h7

Protecting the h6-pawn, preparing ...♘h5 and ...f7-f5.

15.b4

Fixing the b5-pawn to create a weakness on the queenside with a2-a4.

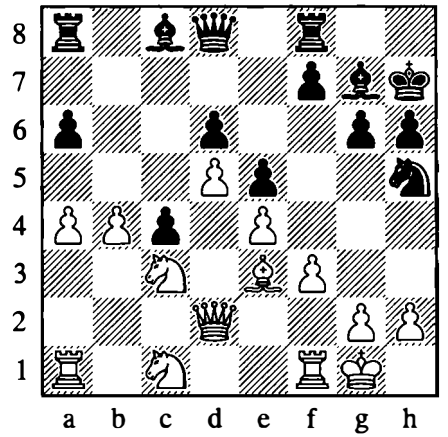
An interesting option was 15.b3!? covering the c4-square and preparing ♘d3-b4-c6. 15...♗b7 (If Black simply proceeds with his kingside plans with 15...♘h5 then the manoeuvre 16.♘d3 f5 17.♘b4 causes him serious trouble. For example: 17...♘f4 18.♘c6 ♕c7 19.♖ac1±) 16.♘d3 ♖c8 17.♖fc1± With a comfortable advantage, followed by a2-a4 weakening Black's queenside.

15...♘h5 16.a4 ♘c4

A necessary decision.

If 16...bxa4 17.♘xa4 ♘xa4 18.♖xa4± Black's queenside is weak and easily accessible to White's forces.

17.♗xc4 bxc4



This is a good moment to weigh up the situation. White has managed to create a serious weakness on the queenside – the c4-pawn. Meanwhile, Black is ready to embark on a kingside attack with ...f7-f5. Chances are somewhat favourable to White, but the situation is far from clear, which is generally what Black players hope for in King's Indian structures.

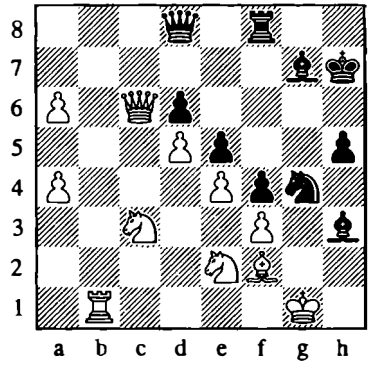
18.♘1e2

Protecting the f4-square.

Attempting to capture the c4-pawn immediately with 18.♕a2 is met by 18...♘f4! 19.♕xc4 ♕g5 20.♗xf4 exf4 when Black has excellent compensation for the pawn, due to his strong bishops.

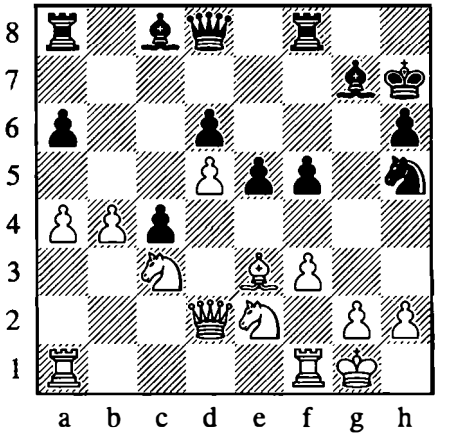
18...f5 19.exf5

If 19.♕a2?! Rogozenko suggests 19...f4 20.♗f2 g5 21.h3 ♘f6 22.♕xc4 h5 with counterplay. In my opinion, White struggles even to find equality in this position, for example: 23.♕c6 ♖b8 24.♖fb1 g4 25.b5 (or 25.hxg4 hxg4 26.b5 g3!? with an attack) 25...gxf3 26.gxf3 ♗xh3 27.bxa6 It seems that White is "getting there" but after the strong sequence: 27...♖xb1†! 28.♖xb1 ♘g4!!



Black obtains a crushing attack after 29.fxg4 ♕g5 30.♔h2 hxg4.

19...gxf5



20.f4?!

After this move the position is simply unclear.

Note how the attention is now far away from Black's weakened queenside.

As Rogozenko suggests, 20.♕a2 was a better continuation, but after 20...♕f6 21.♕xc4 ♕g6 Black can grab some compensation by creating tactical threats such as 22.♕d3 ♗d7 23.♖ab1 ♖g8. And now the careless: 24.♔h1? (instead 24.g3 allows White to retain a small edge) is met by: 24...e4! 25.♕d2 (or 25.fxe4 ♗xc3–+) 25...f4! 26.♗xf4 ♗xc3 27.♘xc3 ♘xf4∓

20...♗d7 21.♖ab1 ♖e8 22.♔h1 ♖b8

All Black's pieces are doing something for his position.

23.♖f3 ♘f6

Aiming to play ...♘g4.

24.h3 ♘h5

Now that the g3-square is weakened, the knight returns to h5. Black's position is easier to conduct.

25.♗g1?

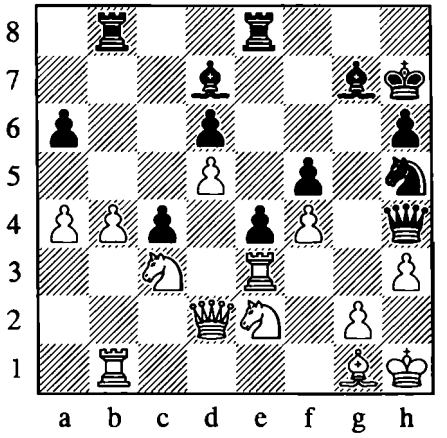
Too slow. White is not really going anywhere, and Black now has a free hand to move around the board and create threats against White's kingside.

Stronger was 25.b5!? creating a passed pawn to distract Black's attention: 25...axb5 26.axb5 ♖b7 27.b6 ♕f6 with a complex position.

25...e4 26.♖e3

Healthier was 26.♖ff1!? but after 26...♗xc3! White must choose between 27.♕xc3 ♗xa4 losing a pawn or 27.♘xc3 ♘g3† losing an exchange.

26...♕h4∓



Suddenly White's position is very vulnerable, and there is just no time to grab the weak c4-pawn. Black's counterplay has succeeded.

27.♗h2 ♖g8 28.♕d1 ♖b7?!

Black was immediately winning after 28...♗xc3! 29.♘xc3 (even worse is 29.♖xc3 ♕f2 30.♕f1 ♕xf1† 31.♖xf1 ♖xb4 as pointed out by Rogozenko) 29...♘xf4 30.♗xf4 ♕xf4 when White has no compensation for the pawn.

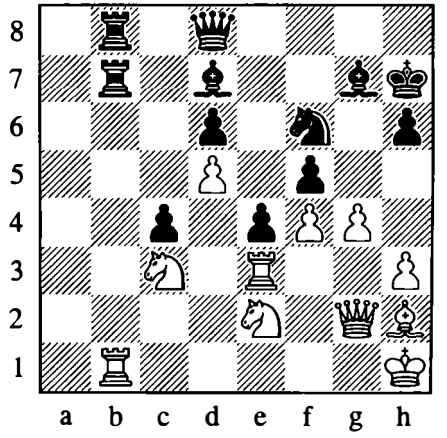
29.♕f1 ♖gb8

Now the b4-pawn is lost.

30.g3 ♕d8 31.b5 axb5 32.axb5 ♘f6 33.g4 ♗xb5 34.♕g2

34.gxf5 doesn't help: 34...♗e8! 35.♖xb7 ♖xb7 36.♘g3 ♗f7 37.♕xc4 ♕a5 Winning the d5-pawn and later the game.

34...♗d7–+



White has no compensation for the pawn, and the rest is relatively simple.

35.♖g1 fxg4 36.hxg4 ♘xg4 37.♖g3 ♕h4 38.♖xg4 ♗xg4 39.♕xg4 ♕xg4 40.♖xg4

White has gained two pieces for a rook, but after:

40...♖b2!

White's pieces are tied up and soon he will lose material.

41.f5 ♖8b3

Threatening ...♗xc3.

42.f6

If 42.♖g3 then: 42...♗e5 43.♖e3 ♖xc3! 44.♘xc3 (or 44.♖xc3 ♗xc3 45.♘xc3 e3–+) **44**...♖xh2†–+

42...♗xf6 43.♘xe4 ♗h8 44.♘4g3 c3

It is amusing that Ponomariov never found the time to capture the weak c4-pawn, and now this very pawn decides the game for Black.

45.♖c4 ♗e5 46.♘c1 ♖b1 47.♘ge2 ♖3b2 48.♗g1 ♖c2

White resigns. He is in semi-zugzwang, since 49.♖e4 loses to 49...♖d2 followed by ...c3-c2, and 49.♔g2? fails to 49...♖bxc1.

0–1

Final remarks

1. Once Black's kingside play got started, his queenside weaknesses became less and less important.
2. White's strategy in this game was generally correct, but his play was imprecise. White had a safe advantage after 15.b3, and even 20.♕a2 was enough to secure a small edge.

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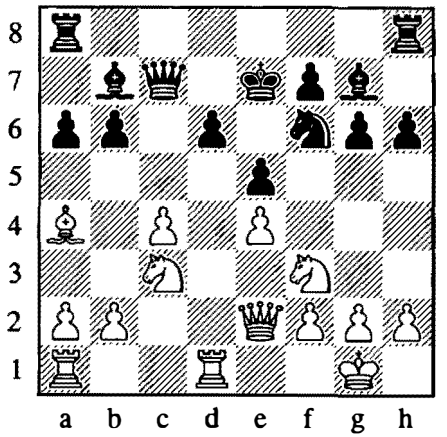
Istanbul Olympiad 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates Black's effective queenside play once the position is somewhat simplified.
2. Later in the game we see the battle between White's light-squared bishop and Black's dark-squared bishop, where Black executes the strong ...♗f6-d8-b6 manoeuvre and manages to win convincingly.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♗d3 ♘f6 6.0–0 d6 7.c4 b6 8.♘c3 ♗b7 9.♕e2 g6 10.♗c2 ♗g7 11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.♘f3 ♕c7 13.♗f4 e5 14.♗g5 h6 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♗a4† ♔e7



We have reached a very interesting position, corresponding to the Najdorf Type II. As the reader may recall, one of the key issues in that structure is the control of the d5-square, thus we know White must be doing okay at the very least. However, comparing this position with the game Tiviakov – Anand from that chapter, we see a crucial difference: White has the wrong bishop. Typically, the light-squared bishop can be very effective on b3 if the c-pawn is still on c2; as an example, take the game Almasi – Aagaard from that chapter. In the present case though, the light-squared bishop has few prospects as it

is blocked by the c4-pawn, which means Black is doing fine.

17.♘d5†?

This is a very unfortunate positional decision; the kind of mistake I hope you will *not* make after reading this book. White chooses a very bad occasion to go into the structure studied in this chapter.

Playing this position in the spirit of a Najdorf Type II yields only equality, for example: 17.♗c2 ♖hc8 18.♗d3 ♔f8 19.♘d2 h5 20.♘f1 ♗h6 with level chances.

But instead, White could have prepared ♘d5, hoping to obtain this chapter's structure under favourable circumstances. I believe the strongest move was:

17.♖ac1 ♖ac8 18.♖c2

18.♘d5†? is premature due to: 18...♘xd5 19.cxd5? ♕xc1∓

18...♖hd8?

Permitting White's positional threat.

18...♕xc4? loses to 19.♘d5† ♗xd5 20.♖xc4 ♗xc4 21.♕e3.

Correct is 18...♕b8 anticipating ♘d5, and now 19.b4!?± gives a small advantage to White.

19.♘d5†! ♘xd5 20.cxd5 ♕b8 21.♗c6±

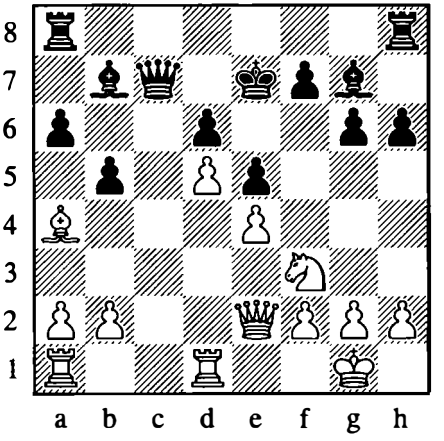
White invades down the c-file, while Black's dark-squared bishop is far away from the action.

17...♘xd5 18.cxd5

And this is a key position to analyze. The reader should ask: what is the difference between this position and Wojtaszek – Swiercz? Black is not well prepared to pursue counterplay with ...f7-f5, but under these conditions he does not even have to. The main point is that there are only two minor pieces on the board, and in particular White is missing his typically strong dark-squared bishop. Black's pieces have sufficient space to manoeuvre, thus the position is roughly equal, or even slightly preferable for Black due to the awkward location of White's light-squared bishop.

18...b5

Another alternative was 18...♖hc8!? securing control of the c-file. It is possible that Black wanted to prevent 19.♗c6!? getting rid of the bad light-squared bishop (but not 19.♖ac1? ♕xc1 20.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 21.♘e1 ♖ac8∓; 19.♘e1?! is met by 19...♕c4!∓) 19...♗xc6 20.dxc6 ♕xc6 21.♕d3 when White has reasonable compensation for the pawn, but it is Black who can play for an advantage.



19.♗b3

The alternative was 19.♗c2 aiming to play ♗d3 followed by a2-a4, and then 19...♗c8! is a good option, relocating the bishop and keeping an eye on an eventual ...f7-f5. 20.♗d3 ♕b6 21.a4 ♗d7 22.axb5 axb5 Black has nothing to fear.

19...♖hc8 20.♘e1 ♕b6 21.a4 bxa4 22.♗xa4 ♔f8

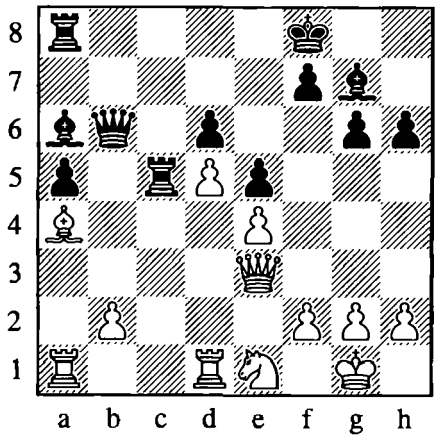
This gives White an interesting opportunity.

More precise was 22...a5 23.♘c2 ♔f8 transposing into the game.

23.♘c2

Somewhat better was 23.♖d3 trying to disrupt Black's queenside play to some extent: 23...a5 24.♖b3 ♕a7 25.♗b5 with approximately level chances.

23...a5 24.♕e3 ♖c5 25.♘e1 ♗a6



26.♗c6?

The bishop does not do much on c6, but the real problem with this move is a small tactical detail which becomes clear after move 28.

Better was 26.b3 ♖b8 when Black's position is slightly better, but White is very likely to hold since Black's dark-squared bishop cannot enter the fray yet.

26...♖b8 27.♘d3 ♗xd3!

This is a strong decision, giving up the pair of bishops at the right moment.

Another option was 27...♖c2!? 28.♕xb6 ♖xb6 29.h3 but White seems to hold well enough.

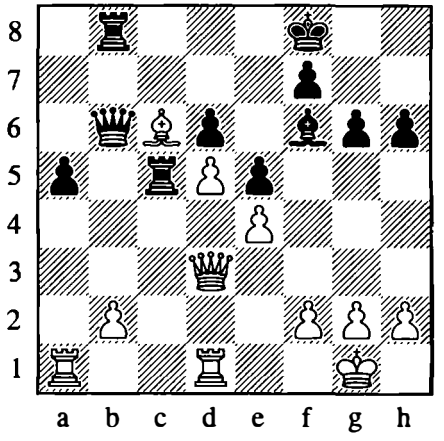
28.♕xd3

And not 28.♖xd3? ♕xb2∓ winning a pawn.

28...♗f6!∓

This is the key to Black's previous move. White's queen has moved away from e3, so the h6-pawn no longer needs protection. I cannot overstate how much I like this move; the idea is to bring the dark-squared bishop into the game via d8-b6, which is similar to the game Polgar – Dominguez from Chapter 8. We have reached a very unpleasant position for White. This is one of those cases where the presence of opposite-coloured bishops does not help the defending side. White will be dominated on the dark squares while the bishop on c6 is basically doing nothing.

But certainly not 28...♕xb2?? 29.♖db1.



29.g3 h5

Again 29...♕xb2?? loses to 30.♖ab1.

An alternative was 29...♕b3!? (threatening ...♕xd3 and then ...♖xb2) and now 30.♕xb3 ♖xb3 31.♖d2 ♗d8!?∓ is similar to the game (instead, gaining a pawn with 31...♗g5 32.♖e2 ♖c1† 33.♖xc1 ♗xc1 34.♗a4 ♖xb2 35.♖xb2 ♗xb2 leads to a drawish endgame).

30.♖db1 ♕b4

Stronger was: 30...♕b3 31.♕xb3 ♖xb3 32.♖a3 ♖b4∓

31.♖a4?!

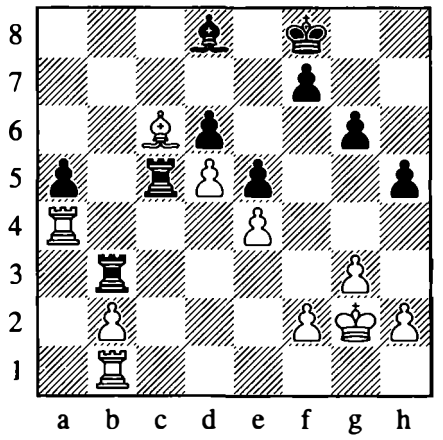
An imprecise defence.

Slightly better was 31.♕e2 ♔g7 32.♗a4 ♗g5 33.♔g2 ♕d2!? 34.♕xd2 ♗xd2∓ which is similar to the game, but White is better prepared to defend his weaknesses.

31...♕b3! 32.♕xb3 ♖xb3 33.♔g2

A better defence was 33.♖a2 ♗d8 34.♗a4 ♖b4 35.f3 f5! 36.exf5 gxf5 37.♖d1 ♗b6∓ when White's position is very uncomfortable due to the weak pawns on b2 and d5.

33...♗d8

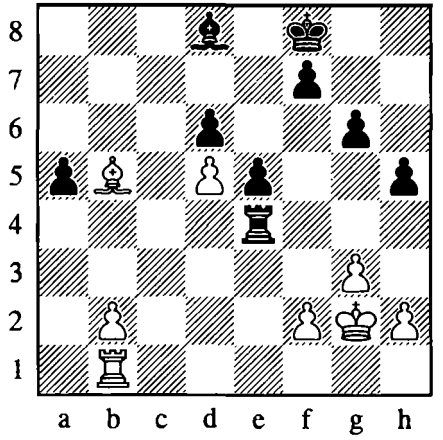


Threatening ...♖c2 and ...♗b6.

34.♖a3 ♖b4 35.♖a4

Unfortunately for White, there is nothing better than this move, and now:

35...♖xa4 36.♗xa4 ♖c4 37.♗b5 ♖xe4–+



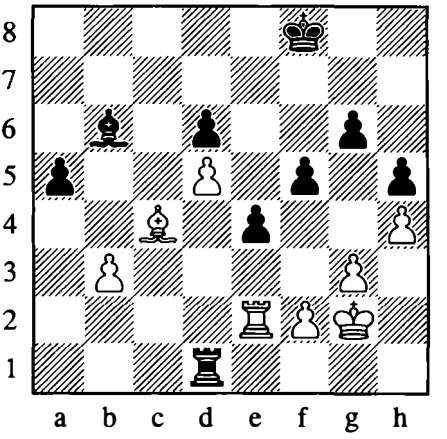
This position and the rest of the game are very similar to Polgar – Dominguez from Chapter 8. In fact, it is the same structure only with an extra pawn on a5. The rest of the game is a pleasing illustration of imposing the advantage with opposite-coloured bishops.

38.b3 ♖b4 39.♗d3 ♖d4 40.♗c4 ♗b6

Threatening ...♖d2.

41.♖b2 ♖d1 42.♖e2 f5 43.h4 e4

The reader should notice how Black has expanded with ...f7-f5 and ...e5-e4, exactly as Dominguez did in the game mentioned above.



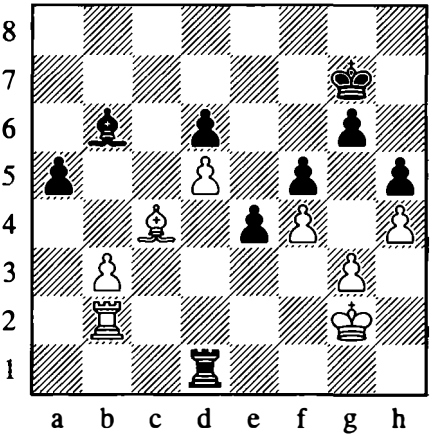
44.♖b2 ♔g7

Black threatens to follow up with ...♔f6-e5 and ...f5-f4.

45.f4

Preventing the potential ...f5-f4, but now the e4-pawn is passed and very strong. White's position is hopeless, but the rest of the game is even nicer.

White cannot wait and allow Black's plan with 45.♖c2 ♔f6 46.♖a2 ♔e5 47.♖c2 f4! (threatening ...f4-f3) 48.gxf4† ♔xf4 49.♖e2 ♗d8 and the h4-pawn is lost.



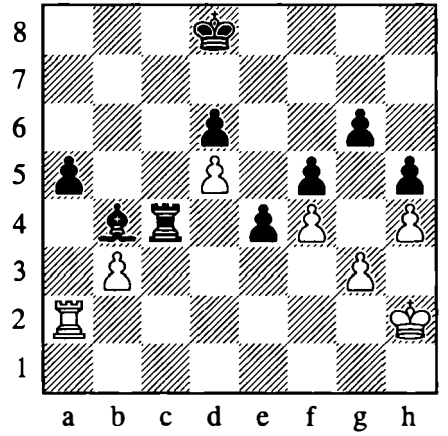
45...♖g1† 46.♔h2 ♖c1 47.♔g2 ♗c5 48.♖a2 ♗b4

White has been locked up.

49.♗b5 ♖c3 50.♗c4 ♔f6 51.♔h2 ♔e7

The king marches decisively to the queenside.

52.♔g2 ♔d8 53.♔h2 ♖xc4!



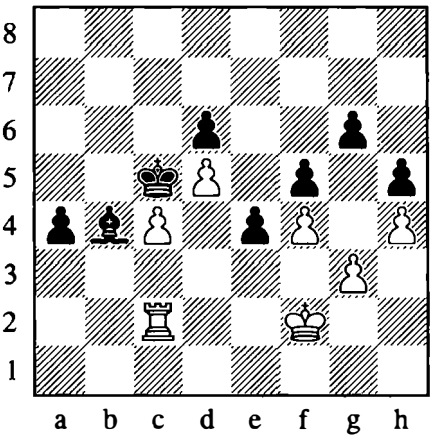
A very nice final blow – even my engine does not believe it at first – but Black is completely winning after this sacrifice.

Of course 53...♔c7!? followed by ...♔b6-c5 and ...a5-a4 is also winning.

54.bxc4 ♔c7 55.♔g2 ♔b6 56.♔f2

56.♖a1 doesn't help: 56...♔c5 57.♖c1 a4 58.♔f2 a3 59.♔e3 ♗a5 Followed by ...♔b4 winning.

56...♔c5 57.♖c2 a4



White resigns. White is unable to prevent the promotion of the a-pawn after: 58.♔e2 a3 59.♔e3 ♗a5! Clearing the b4-square for the king: 60.♔e2 ♔b4 61.♔d1 ♔b3

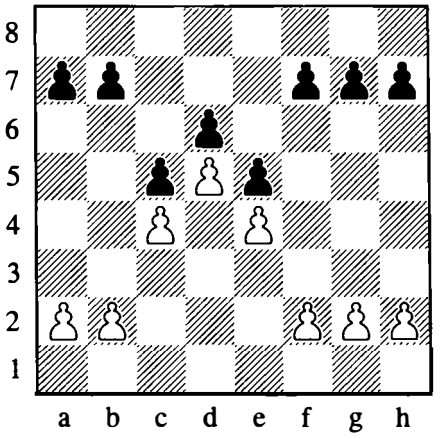
0–1

Final remarks

1. The resemblance between this game and Polgar – Dominguez from Chapter 8 is astonishing, and the reader is encouraged to revisit that game. This similarity only reinforces how similar pawn structures have similar plans and strategic elements.
2. White was unable to gradually increase his queenside predominance (as often occurs in this structure) because two minor pieces were already off the board on move 18, and because his light-squared bishop was of little use.
3. Black's most essential move was 28...♗f6, bringing the bishop into the game via d8-b6. This thematic manoeuvre is something to remember, as the bishop became much stronger than White's bishop on c6.

Chapter 15

KID Type II



The structure studied in this chapter often arises from King's Indian and Benoni variations. It is a common variant of the most typical King's Indian structure, which is studied in the next chapter, where Black has a pawn on c7 rather than c5. By having his pawn on c5, Black is able to slow down White's queenside play, giving Black chances for a checkmating attack in standard King's Indian style. Nevertheless, White has a significant spatial advantage and may attempt active play on both flanks, which is generally enough to guarantee a small advantage.

Unlike other structures studied in this book, the tightly closed nature of this structure provides both sides with multiple ways to carry out their plans. There exist so many possibilities that analyzing a position thoroughly is a rather complex task, even with the help of an engine. In addition, many games will result in opposite-flank attacks, which are difficult to evaluate as they combine many tactical and strategic elements. Finally, I believe most of today's engines are poorly prepared to evaluate these kinds of closed positions properly, as the engines are not fully capable of foreseeing the many positional sacrifices Black may make in an attack.

As a general statement, I believe White is slightly better in most of these positions, but the resulting games are so flexible and complicated that Black always stands a chance. On the plus side, this structure's complexity is ideal for those players who absolutely need to play for a win as Black. Now let's outline specific plans for each side.

White's plans

1. Create queenside tension with b2-b4, and later invade down the b-file.
2. Create central tension with the f2-f4 break, and later obtain a kingside attack, or pressure against the potentially weak d6-pawn.
3. Block the kingside with g2-g4, and then proceed with a queenside attack.
4. Trade light-squared bishops if possible, as it often reduces the strength of Black's kingside attack.
5. If possible, respond to Black's ...f7-f5 break with ♘g5-e6 and make use of this outpost. This is a good idea, though Black players will rarely allow it.

Black's plans

1. Create a kingside attack by means of ...f7-f5-f4 and then ...g6-g5-g4.
2. Gain kingside activity with ...f7-f5xe4 opening the f-file. This plan is faster than Plan 1, but not as strong.
3. Advance ...h7-h5-h4, and possibly activate the fianchettoed bishop through the h6-c1 diagonal.

4. Play on the queenside with ...b7-b5, though this is far less likely as White is going to play b2-b4 and the resulting tension is usually favourable to White due to his spatial advantage.

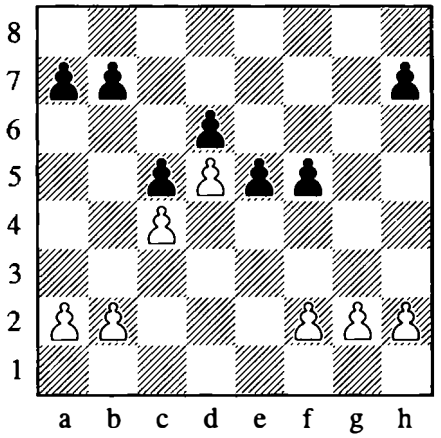
White's Plan 1 is probably the most common, while Black's Plan 4 is pretty rare, since White has more space on the queenside and is likely to dominate this side of the board. Choosing between Black's Plans 1 and 2 (...f5-f4 or ...f5xe4) depends on how far advanced White is on the queenside. Similarly to the previous chapter, if White is already creating threats, then playing ...f5-f4 and attempting ...g6-g5-g4 will be far too slow to help. In contrast, if Black has managed to neutralize White's queenside play, then Black's Plan 1 is certainly the most ambitious and advisable continuation.

Black will play ...f7-f5 in essentially every game in this structure, which means White will probably have an option to play exf5 (or in some cases be forced to make this capture). This capture on f5 modifies the structure significantly, and Black may recapture this pawn with the g-pawn or with a piece. The first two examples of this chapter will consider Black's recapture ...gxf5, while the third example will briefly explain what happens when Black recaptures on f5 with a piece.

The following chapter will have four additional examples of these positions, with the only difference of having a pawn on c7 rather than c5, which does not modify the character of the game so much.

After the third example the remainder of the chapter will be devoted to the study of White's plans. One example will examine White's queenside play with b2-b4, while the other will illustrate how White may carry out the f2-f4 central break successfully. White's Plan 3 (g2-g4) is worthy of attention, but will not be included in this chapter, as a similar version of it is studied in Chapter 16.

Transformation A



Conceptually speaking, recapturing on f5 with a pawn seems to be the healthier option, keeping control of the e4-square and opening the g-file for the potential kingside attack which Black may develop.

White will often advance his f-pawn to either f3 or f4, giving rise to different types of games. The following two games will exemplify each case. White wins in the first example by playing f2-f4, and loses in the second case when playing f2-f3, but this does *not* mean one reaction is correct while the other is erroneous. The reader should pay close attention to why a player may choose f2-f4 over f2-f3 and vice versa. In addition, he should observe which manoeuvres give advantage to each side for each of these structures.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Alexei Fedorov

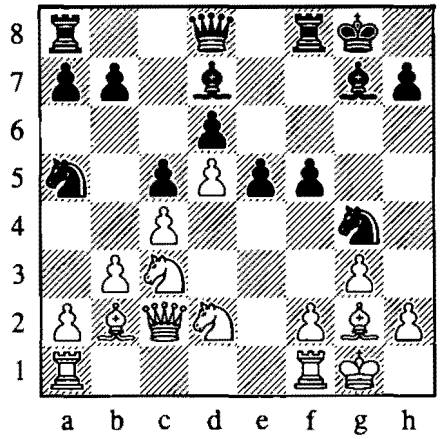
Czech Republic 2012

Learning objective: This game is an example of White's f2-f4 reaction against Black's recapture with ...gxf5.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 d6 5.g3 0–0 6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♗f5 8.d5 ♘a5 9.♘d2 c5 10.e4 ♗d7 11.♕c2 e5 12.b3 ♘g4

Both players follow theory quite closely, and now we are heading to the position of interest.

13.♗b2 f5 14.exf5 gxf5

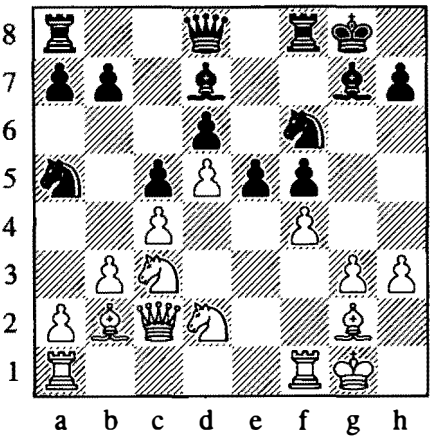


This position has occurred in a total of six games, and White scored four and a half points, so we may guess White's position is somewhat preferable. Let's examine the position. Black has captured on f5 with his pawn in order to prevent White from installing a powerful knight on e4. This gives rise to a generally complex position. Black may attempt to:

1. Weaken White's kingside with ...h7-h5-h4.
2. Transfer his queen and rook to the h-file with attacking chances.
3. Play ...e5-e4 in order to open the h8-a1 diagonal and gain potential outposts on d3 and f3.

As previously mentioned, White will often choose between playing f2-f3 or f2-f4. In this case the choice is relatively simple since f2-f3 would block the bishop on g2. As the reader may note, White's pieces are not well arranged to pursue other plans, such as b2-b4, hence the game continued with:

15.h3 ♘f6 16.f4



16...e4

This reaction is pretty much forced in most positions, and now we reach a critical moment in the game. White has only one good plan, which is: prepare the break g3-g4. Meanwhile Black must prevent this plan or he will face a formidable kingside attack. The following moves are rather thematic, but the order in which they are executed can make a dramatic difference, hence they deserve careful calculation.

If 16...exf4 17.gxf4± White will make better use of the g-file, due to his spatial edge and Black's useless knight on a5.

17.♘d1 ♕e8

Typical – heading towards g6 to apply pressure down the g-file, and preventing g3-g4.

18.♔h2?!

This is not the best move order.

A better move order was:
18.♘e3

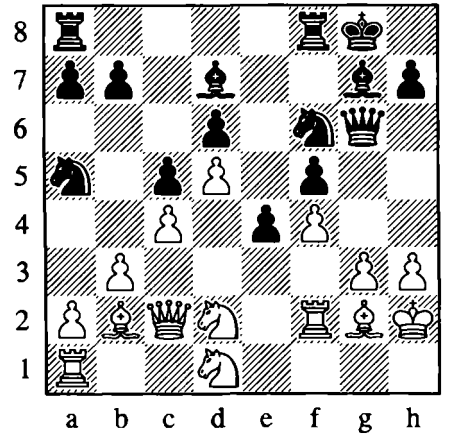
Intending to meet:
18...♕g6
With:
19.g4! fxg4 20.f5
Or 20.hxg4!? ♖ae8? (better is 20...♗xg4 21.♖ae1 ♗h5 22.♘xe4±) 21.f5 ♕g5 22.♖ae1± when White is nearly winning, as in the game Baryshpolets – Turov, Voronezh 2012.
After the text move the complications favour White, for example:
20...♕g5 21.♘xg4 ♗xf5 22.♘xf6† ♗xf6 23.♗xf6 ♖xf6 24.♘xe4 ♗xe4 25.♕xe4±
Black's main problem is his useless knight on a5.

Instead, after 18.♘e3 Black should reply with 18...h5 and now White can rearrange his pieces in a desirable way, for example 19.♔h2 (19.g4!? is another option) 19...♕g6 20.♖g1 ♖f7 21.♗f1± followed by ♘g2-h4.

18...♕g6 19.♖f2?!

Clearing f1 to meet 19...♘h5 with 20.♘f1, but this is not the most accurate.

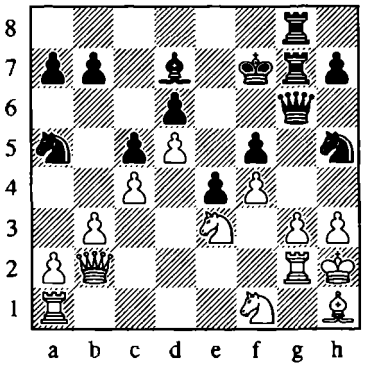
A more effective move order was 19.♘e3!? since White is better prepared for the complications arising after: 19...♘h5 20.g4 fxg4 21.f5! For example: 21...♗xf5 22.♘xf5 ♖xf5 23.♗xe4 ♗xb2 24.♕xb2 g3† 25.♔g2 ♖xf1 26.♖xf1±



19...♔f7?

Black is playing with the right idea, that is, to place a rook on the g-file to press against the break g3-g4. Unfortunately, this is not the best way to implement this plan.

Much better was 19...♘h5 20.♘f1 ♖f7 when White's pieces cannot easily be organized, say after: 21.♘de3 ♗xb2 22.♕xb2 ♖g7 23.♗h1 ♔f7 (but not 23...♘xg3? due to 24.♖g2 ♘xf1† 25.♖xf1 ♕f7 26.♖xg7† ♕xg7 27.♖g1+–) 24.♖g2 ♖ag8∓



It will be difficult to carry out g3-g4, hence White risks being squeezed to death.

20.♘e3

From e3 the knight supports g3-g4 and exerts pressure on the f5-pawn.

20...♖g8

The try 20...♘h5 no longer works due to: 21.g4! ♗xb2 (or 21...fxg4 22.hxg4 ♗xg4 23.♗xe4+–) 22.♕xb2 ♘f6 23.♘xf5 ♗xf5 24.gxf5 ♕xf5 25.♖e1±

21.♖g1

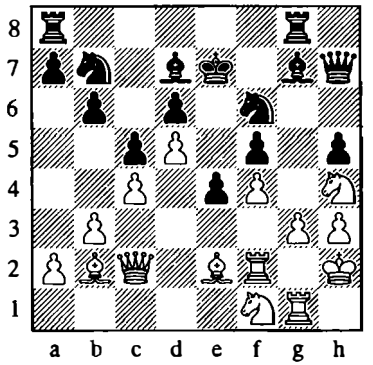
Unlike the variation 19...♘h5, White is now in time to bring his rook to the kingside.

21...♗h6?

This is a serious mistake which costs Fedorov the game. He has underestimated the strength of the break g3-g4, and will pay the price.

It was absolutely necessary to play 21...h5 preventing g3-g4, but after 22.♗f1 ♔e7 23.♗e2 b6 24.♘g2!? White can slowly manoeuvre in

order to prepare the g3-g4 break: 24...♘b7 25.♘h4 ♕h7 26.♘f1±



This can be followed by ♘e3 and possibly transferring the king to the queenside. This is a very nice position for the reader to analyze; White is certainly calling the shots, but Black's position is solid for the moment.

22.♗h1

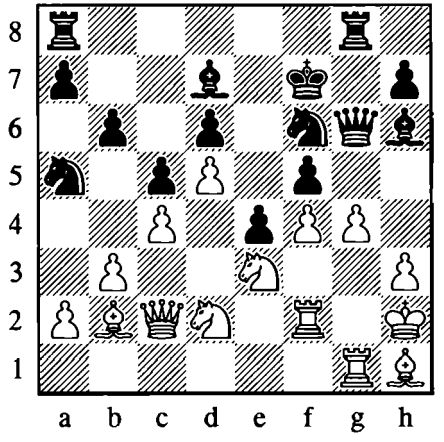
This is better than 22.♗f1, as the bishop on h1 keeps an eye on the e4-pawn, which will be severely weakened after g3-g4.

22...b6

If 22...♖ae8 then 23.g4 fxg4 24.♖g3!+– followed by ♗xf6, which is similar to the game.

The try 22...♗g7 23.g4 ♗h8 does not help either due to the simple 24.♖ff1! threatening gxf5 or g4-g5 followed by ♘xe4 winning.

23.g4!+–



White has achieved the desired g3-g4 break under perfect circumstances. Black's position falls apart immediately due to White's excellent piece coordination, and the vulnerability of Black's king and the e4-pawn.

23...fxg4

23...♗f8 doesn't help, because after 24.g5 ♘e8 25.♘xe4! White opens the position decisively, for example: 25...fxe4 26.♗xe4 ♕h5 27.♗f5! ♔e7 28.♕e4† ♔d8 29.♗xd7 ♔xd7 30.♕e6†

24.♖g3!

Preventing ...g4-g3, and preparing the decisive ♗xf6 followed by ♘xe4; Black is helpless against this threat.

24...♖ae8 25.♗xf6 ♕xf6 26.♘xe4 ♕e7 27.♘xg4 ♗xg4

Even worse is: 27...♗f8? 28.♘g5† ♔g7 29.♕xh7#

28.hxg4 ♕h4† 29.♖h3 ♕xg4 30.♘g5† ♗xg5 31.♕xh7†

Black resigns. Mate is unavoidable, for example: 31...♖g7 (or 31...♔f6 32.fxg5† ♔e5 33.♖e3† ♔d4 34.♕d3#) 32.fxg5† ♔e7 33.♕xg7† ♔d8 34.♖h7

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's strategy in this game was generally correct: he exerted pressure along the g-file and attempted to prevent the g3-g4 break. His big failure was missing the precise 19...♘h5 to prevent White's ideal piece organization.
2. After 19...♔f7, White obtained an ideal piece coordination, and the threat of g3-g4 gained significant strength, securing a comfortable advantage. If the reader wishes to learn more, he should analyze the resulting position after 21...h5, as suggested above.

Kacper Piorun – Tiger Hillarp Persson

Stockholm 2014

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates how Black may force White to capture with exf5 due to the pressure against the e4-pawn.
2. Then it illustrates Black's kingside attack after the recapture ...gxf5.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♗g5 f6 10.♗h4

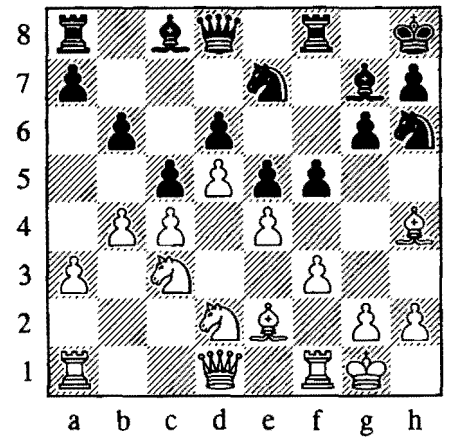
So far both sides follow the theory and now:

10...♔h8

This is a rare but nonetheless good alternative.

Another complex variation begins with 10...g5 11.♗g3 ♘h6 12.dxe5 fxe5.

11.d5 ♘e7 12.♘d2 ♘h6 13.f3 c5 14.a3 b6 15.b4 f5



16.bxc5

A promising option was 16.♖b1!? since after 16...♘f7 17.♗f2 ♗h6 White could consider 18.a4!? cxb4 19.♖xb4 to later break with a4-a5.

16...bxc5

We reach a critical position as White needs to find a plan to create queenside threats.

17.♕a4

A healthier option was 17.♖b1 and if Black attempts to continue as he did in the game with 17...♘f7 18.♕c2 ♗h6 then White could reply 19.exf5!? gxf5 20.♗d3 ♗g5 21.♗xg5 ♘xg5 22.f4!± with a comfortable position.

17...♗d7 18.♕a6 ♗c8 19.♕a4 ♗d7 20.♕a6 ♗c8 21.♕b5?!

White refuses a repetition even though he has no plan in mind. White could have drawn with 21.♕a4.

21...♘f7 22.♘b3?

Hoping for ♘a5-c6, but this knight only diverts White's queen onto a bad square.

Better was 22.♕b1 ♗h6 23.♕d3 preventing ♗e3, with roughly level chances.

22...a5!

Preventing 23.♘a5.

23.♕a4?

Another questionable move; what is the queen useful for here?

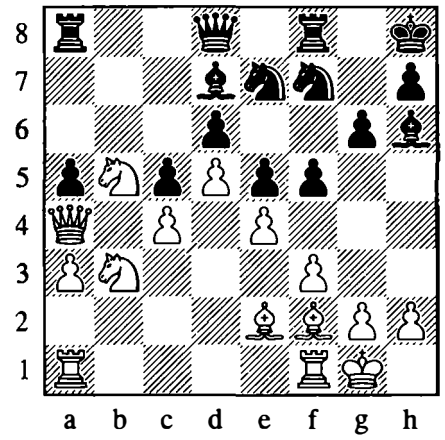
If 23.♘xc5 dxc5 24.♕xc5 g5 25.♗f2 ♘g6 White's pawns are not threatening enough to fully compensate for the piece.

Healthier was 23.♘d2 ♗h6 24.♕b2 accepting the previous mistakes and returning the queen to the defence, though after 24...♗e3† 25.♗f2 ♗xf2† (or 25...♗d4!?) 26.♖xf2 f4 Black will gain a promising kingside attack after ...g6-g5-g4.

23...♗h6 24.♗f2

Capturing the a5-pawn with 24.♘b5 ♗e3† 25.♔h1 g5 26.♗e1 f4 27.♗xa5 ♕e8 leaves White's pieces tied up and after 28.♗d1 ♘d8 (launching an attack with 28...h5!? should work too) 29.♘c3 ♗d7 30.♘b5 ♘b7 Black is winning a piece.

24...♗d7 25.♘b5



The reader should note how White's queenside play is leading nowhere. Furthermore, the queen is trapped and useless on a4.

25...♘g8!

Preparing ...♘f6 to put pressure on the e4-pawn, which is supporting White's pawn chain.

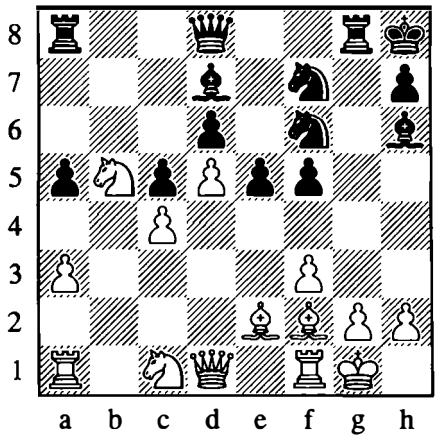
Black would also be doing well after 25...fxe4!? 26.fxe4 ♘g8 to follow with ...♘f6 attacking the e4-pawn, and White is near collapse. For example: 27.♗d3 (or 27.♗f3 ♘g5∓) 27...♘f6 (threatening ...♘g4) 28.♗h4 This is refuted by 28...♗e3†! 29.♔h1 ♘g5 30.♖ae1 ♘g4 with a decisive attack. After 31 ♗g3 ♗f4! 32.♗xf4 ♖xf4 33.♖xf4 exf4 once again, White's queen is useless on a4.

26.exf5

White is essentially being forced to capture this pawn, as Black would follow up with 26...♘f6, further pressuring the e4-pawn.

If 26.♗d3 fxe4!? 27.♗xe4 (27.fxe4 ♘f6 transposes to 25...fxe4 which is analyzed above; 28.♔h1 ♘g4) 27...♘g5 28.♖ae1 ♘xe4 29.fxe4 ♕b6∓ when White looks like losing a pawn after ...♖fb8 and ...♗xb5.

26...gxf5 27.♘c1 ♘f6 28.♕d1 ♖g8∓



Black's pieces are ideally set up for a kingside attack. The rook is on the open g-file and ...♘h5-f4 is threatening, while White's queenside play has gained nothing. It might be too soon to say this, but after analyzing this game for hours I concluded White's position is already desperate.

29.♘c3

White is also doomed after 29.♖b1 ♘h5 30.♗d3 (or 30.♘d3 ♕g5 31.g3 ♕h4 32.♕e1 ♘xg3! 33.hxg3 ♖xg3† 34.♗xg3 ♖g8 with a crushing attack) 30...♕g5 31.g3 ♕h4 winning in similar fashion to the game.

29...♘h5 30.♘d3

A waiting move like 30.♖b1 loses on the spot to 30...♕g5 31.g3 ♕h4! 32.♕e1 ♗f4 threatening ...♘xg3 winning, and after 33.♔g2 ♗xg3! 34.hxg3 (or 34.♗xg3 f4) 34...♘f4† 35.♔g1 ♕h3 mate is unstoppable.

30.♔h1 doesn't help: 30...♗f4 31.♘d3 ♗xh2! 32.♔xh2 ♕g5 With a winning attack: 33.♘e1 ♘f4 34.g3 ♕h6† 35.♔g1 ♘g5! A picturesque win for Black.

30...♕g5 31.g3

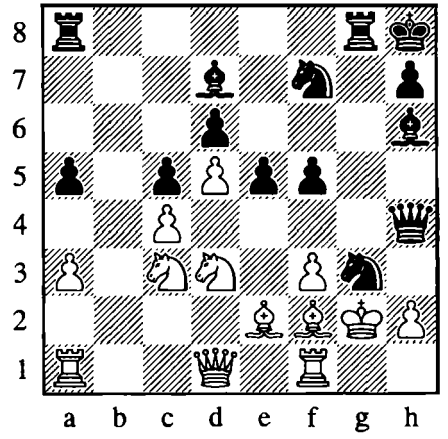
More stubborn was 31.♘e1 but after 31...♕g7! White is defenceless against the threat of ...♗f4xh2. For example: 32.♔h1 (or 32.♖b1 ♗f4 33.♖b7 ♗xh2† 34.♔xh2 ♘f4 threatening ...♕h6 and ...♘h3 winning: 35.g3 ♕h6† 36.♔g1 ♘g5!) 32...♗f4 33.♗g1 ♘g3†! 34.hxg3 ♕xg3 Followed by ...♕h4 mating.

31...♕h4 32.♔g2

Protecting g3 with 32.♕e1 is refuted by: 32...♘xg3! 33.hxg3 (or 33.♗xg3 f4 34.♘e4 fxg3 35.♘xg3 ♗f4–+) 33...♗d2! 34.♕xd2 ♖xg3† 35.♗xg3 ♕xg3† 36.♔h1 ♕h4† 37.♔g1 ♖g8† 38.♕g5 ♖xg5#

32...♘xg3!–+

Breaking through the defence; White's position collapses due to the mate threats.



33.hxg3

No aid comes from 33.♗xg3 f4 34.♘e4 fxg3 35.♘xg3 ♗f4 followed by ...♗xg3 or ...♗h3, carrying out a demolition job.

33...♖xg3†!

This is the key, gaining a tempo to bring in the other rook; White just does not have time to organize a defence.

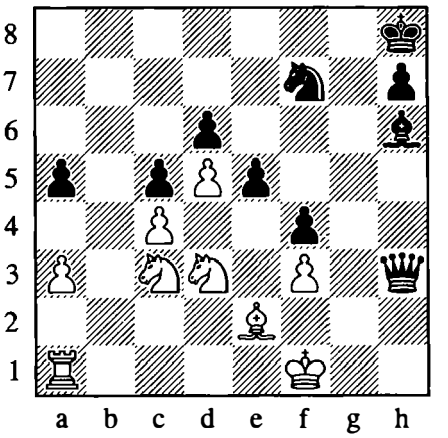
34.♗xg3 ♖g8 35.♕e1 f4 36.♖h1

Or 36.♘e4 ♗h3† 37.♔g1 fxg3 threatening ...♗e3 or ...♗xf1.

36...♖xg3† 37.♕xg3

Even worse is: 37.♔f2? ♖h3† 38.♔g2 ♕g5† 39.♔f2 ♕g3† 40.♔f1 ♖xh1#

37...♕xg3† 38.♔f1 ♗h3† 39.♖xh3 ♕xh3†



Black has a huge material advantage and the rest is simple.

40.♔g1 ♘g5 41.♘f2 ♘xf3† 42.♗xf3 ♕xf3 43.♘ce4 ♗g5! 44.♘xd6

Or: 44.♘xg5 ♕g3† 45.♔f1 ♕xg5–+

44...♕g3† 45.♔f1 f3 46.♘f7† ♔g7

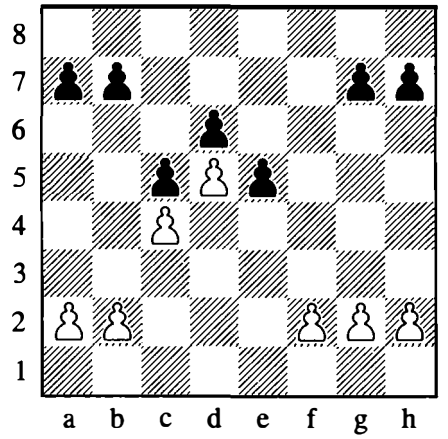
White resigns in view of ...♕g2-g1 winning more material.

0–1

Final remarks

1. White's biggest mistake was wasting time with moves 17, 21, 22 and 23, to then get his own queen stuck out of the game. The problem was White's lack of targets on the queenside.
2. After 26.exf5 gxf5 Black is essentially winning, but *not* because of the structure. Black is winning because White cannot prevent the knight transfer ...♘h5-f4, and because the queen is still completely sidelined on a4.

Transformation B



When Black recaptures on f5 with a piece, the resulting structure gives a natural outpost for White on e4. In fact, White's main plan in this position will be to establish firm control of the e4-square, preferably by occupying it with a knight. With a white knight on e4, Black's d6-pawn will be weak, and later White can proceed with the b2-b4 break which will often allow him to secure a small advantage.

Black is not without counterplay, and he may find many active continuations based on a kingside attack. Black's potential plans could be:

1. Place knights on f4 and specially d4, to create tactical threats.
2. Play ...g6-g5-g4 to pressure White's f-pawn (which will probably be on f3) and then open lines for attack.
3. Fight for the control of the e4-square by placing a bishop on f5 and a knight on f6.

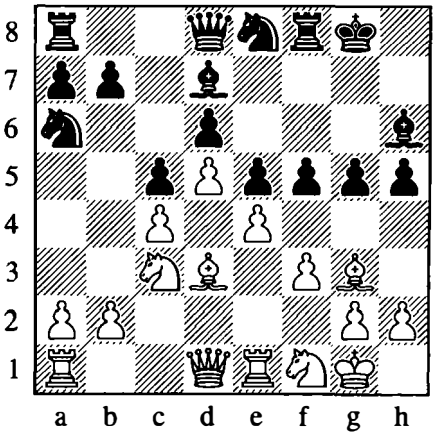
It is very important for Black to maintain good control of his light squares. For this reason, he should try to avoid trading light-squared bishops, as White's control of the e4-square would be far easier and Black's kingside counterplay would be less likely to work. In this chapter we see one example to illustrate this point, though in the next chapter we will see another example of a similar structure (Renet – Giri), in which Black's attack is well executed.

Sandro Mareco – Axel Bachmann

Santos 2010

Learning objective: This game teaches us how White gains control of the game once light-squared bishops are traded. Note how passive Black's dark-squared bishop is.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 d6 5.e4 0–0 6.♗e2 ♘a6 7.0–0 e5 8.♖e1 c6 9.♗f1 ♗g4 10.d5 c5 11.♗g5 h6 12.♗h4 ♗d7 13.♘d2 g5 14.♗g3 h5 15.f3 ♗h6 16.♗d3 ♘e8 17.♘f1 f5



18.exf5 ♗xf5

Attempting to preserve the light-squared bishop with 18...♘g7 19.♗f2 ♘xf5 is answered by 20.♗xf5! ♗xf5 21.♘g3 ♗g6 22.♘ge4± followed by ♗e3 and possibly g2-g4, blocking the kingside in similar fashion to the game.

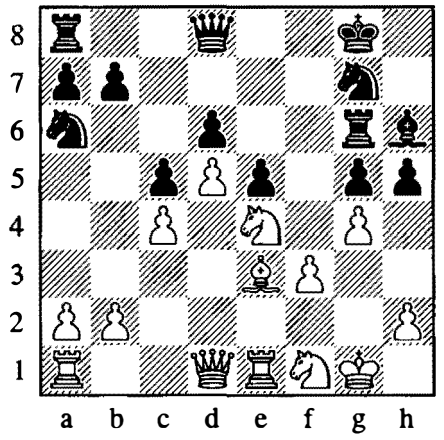
19.♗xf5 ♖xf5

The light-squared bishops come off the board, allowing White to easily control the key e4-square. In addition after:

20.♗f2 ♘g7 21.♗e3!

The g5-pawn is fixed and White will be able to lock Black's dark-squared bishop out of the game.

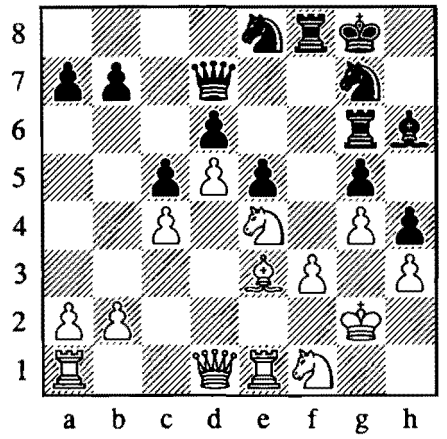
21...♖f6 22.♘e4 ♖g6 23.g4!±



The kingside is blocked and White has not created any weaknesses which Black could exploit. White controls the e4-square and his bishop on e3 is far stronger than Black's trapped bishop on h6. Hence, White is positionally winning already.

23...♕d7 24.h3 ♖f8 25.♔g2 ♘c7 26.♘fg3 h4 27.♘f1 ♘ce8

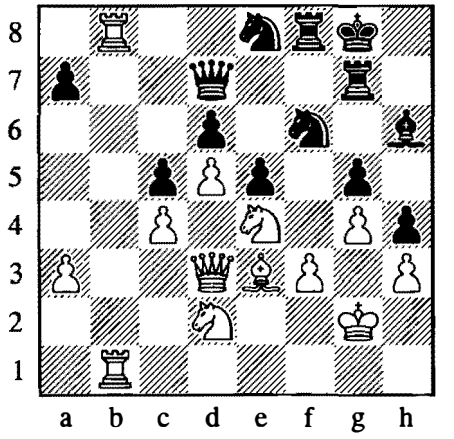
Black does not gain much from 27...b5 28.b3 as after 28...♕f7 29.♘fd2 ♘ge8 30.♕e2 ♕d7 31.♖ab1± White will favourably open the queenside with b3-b4 anyway.



28.♕d3 ♔f7 29.♘fd2 ♘f6 30.a3 ♘ge8 31.b4 b6 32.bxc5 bxc5

Even worse is 32...dxc5? 33.♗xc5! bxc5 34.♘xc5 ♕d6 35.♘e6 ♖fg8 36.♖ab1 followed by ♖b7 with a decisive attack.

33.♖ab1 ♖g7 34.♖b8 ♔g8 35.♖eb1



And Black resigned in this desperate position.
1–0

A possible continuation could have been:

35...♘xe4 36.♘xe4 ♕f7 37.♖xe8! ♕xe8

The queen is trapped after 37...♕xf3† 38.♔h2 ♖xe8 39.♖f1.

38.♘xd6 ♕g6 39.♘f5 ♔h7 40.♗xc5 ♖c8 41.♗e3

And the central pawns decide the game.

Final remarks

1. This game teaches us how grave it is for Black to lose control of the light squares in a King's Indian Type II-B structure.
2. White's idea 23.g4! works excellently because it locks Black's bishop out of the game, and because Black's pieces are not well arranged to take advantage of the weak f4-square.

Sandro Mareco – Jorge Cori

Buenos Aires 2009

Learning objectives:
1. This game illustrates White's queenside play with the b2-b4 break.
2. Special attention should be paid to Black's mistake with 10...a6.

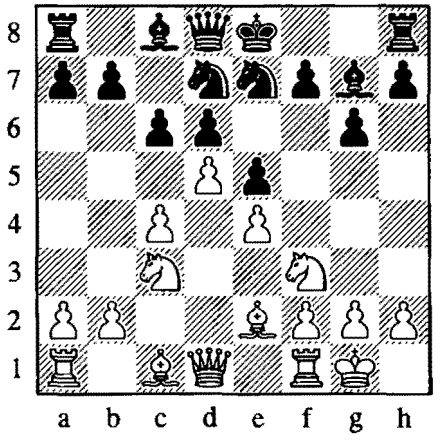
1.d4 g6 2.c4 ♗g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.♘c3 c6 5.e4 e5 6.♗e2 ♘d7 7.0–0 ♘e7

Black's opening choice aims to obtain a King's Indian type of position, without the need to know specific opening lines. This strategy is typically double-edged, as it avoids the opponent's opening preparation, but the resulting position could turn out to be inferior from the start.

8.d5!?

This move forces Black to define his central pawn structure.

Another strong option was 8.♗e3!? 0–0 9.♕d2 since the only reaction 9...f5 can be met by: 10.♗g5 (or 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 12.♗d4!?±) 10...♘f6 11.exf5 exd4 12.♘xd4 ♘xf5 13.♘xf5 ♗xf5 14.♖ad1± With a stable advantage due to the backward d6-pawn.



8...c5

Now Black has obtained a somewhat inferior version of the structure studied in this chapter. Black's problem is his knight on d7, which blocks the light-squared bishop, hence the plan ...f7-f5 is momentarily 'banned' due to the annoying reply ♘g5-e6.

Worse is 8...cxd5 9.cxd5 0–0 10.♗e3± when White obtains a favourable version of the structure studied in the previous chapter, since Black is not ready to fight for the c-file and his kingside counterplay has not started.

9.a3

Probably the only move that deserves consideration. White will create queenside pressure with b2-b4.

9...0–0 10.b4 a6?!

One of my hopes in showing this game is that the reader will *never* make this mistake. This move weakens the b6-square for the rest of the game, and should be avoided if possible.

Correct was 10...b6! which is similar to Piorun – Hillarp Persson from this chapter: 11.♖b1 h6 followed by ...f7-f5. Black's position is perfectly playable (the direct 11...f5 struggles against 12.♘g5 ♘f6 13.♗f3, preparing ♘e6, 13...fxe4 14.♘cxe4±).

11.♖b1 ♕c7

Supporting the c5-pawn.

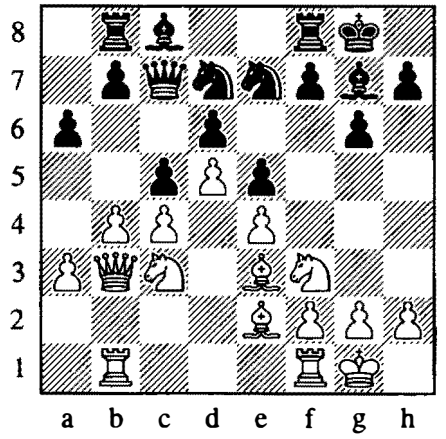
If Black simply launches an attack with 11...h6 12.♗e3 f5 then after 13.bxc5 dxc5 (not 13...f4? 14.cxd6 fxe3 15.fxe3! when White wins two pawns for little compensation) 14.a4 f4 15.♗c1 g5 16.♘e1 White is positionally winning due to the weakness of the c5-pawn. A sample variation is 16...♘g6 17.♘d3 ♕c7 18.♗a3 b6 19.♕c2 ♖d8 20.a5! bxa5 21.♘a4 ♗f8 22.♗g4 winning the c5-pawn and the game.

12.♗e3 ♖b8

12...f5? loses to 13.♘g5 threatening ♘e6 and after 13...♘f6 14.bxc5.

13.♕b3

Creating the positional threat of 14.bxc5.



13...b6

Once again, the try 13...f5? is met by: 14.♘g5 ♘f6 15.bxc5 dxc5 16.♘a4! b6 17.♘xc5+–

The waiting move 13...h6? is met by the strong: 14.bxc5 ♘xc5 (14...dxc5 is also losing after the illustrative variation: 15.♖fd1 ♕d6 16.a4 f5 17.a5 f4 18.♗d2 g5 19.♘e1 ♘f6 20.♕a3 ♗d7 21.♖b6) 15.♕b6! Winning a pawn, for example: 15...♕xb6 16.♖xb6 ♖d8 17.♗xc5 dxc5 18.♘a4+–

14.♖fd1 h6

Preparing ...f7-f5.

Again 14...f5? fails to 15.♘g5 followed by ♘e6.

Now that Black has wasted a tempo with 14...h6, White proceeds with the typical manoeuvre:

15.♘e1

Heading toward d3 to pressure c5. Moreover, White must be ready to meet ...f7-f5 with f2-f3 in order to maintain the solidity of his position.

15...f5

Black typically will not consider the option 15...cxb4?! 16.axb4 as it reinforces White's centre. A possible continuation is: 16..f5 17.f3 ♘f6 18.♘d3 (preparing c4-c5) 18...fxe4 19.fxe4 ♗g4 20.♘f2 ♗xe2 21.♘xe2± when the positional threat of c4-c5 is hard to prevent.

16.f3 ♗b7 17.♘a4 ♗a8 18.♘d3 ♖b7

Opening the f-file with 18...fxe4?! does not bring anything good for Black after: 19.fxe4 ♘f6 20.♘c3 ♔h7 21.♘f2 g5 22.g3±

The counter-break 18...b5? fails against: 19.♘axc5! dxc5 20.♘xc5 ♕d6 (or 20...♘xc5 21.bxc5 when the passed pawns decide the game) 21.cxb5 axb5 22.♘xd7 ♕xd7 23.d6†+–

19.♕c3 ♖fb8

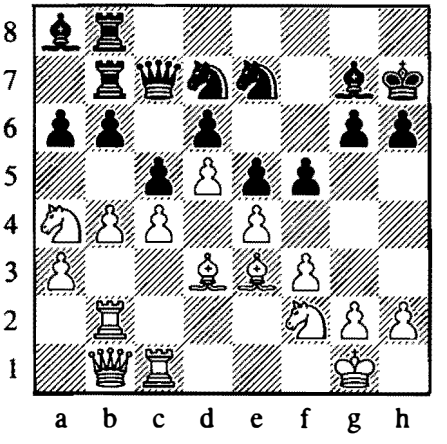
Again 19...b5? loses to 20.♘axc5! dxc5 21.♘xc5 ♘xc5 22.bxc5.

The kingside try 19...f4 20.♗f2 g5 could be met by the tricky 21.♕c2!? protecting the knight on a4, and preparing: 21...h5 22.bxc5 bxc5 23.♘dxc5! ♖xb1 24.♕xb1 dxc5 25.d6 ♕d8 26.dxe7 ♕xe7 27.♘c3± With a big advantage due to Black's weaknesses on d5, c5 and a6.

20.♖b2 ♘c8

Once again 20...b5? loses to 21.♘axc5! as above.

21.♖c1 ♔h7 22.♕c2 ♘e7 23.♘f2 ♖c8 24.♕b1 ♖cb8 25.♗d3!



White wants to force Black to advance ...f5-f4, thus releasing the tension on the kingside, and giving White a free hand on the queenside.

25...♖f8

Keeping the tension.

If 25...f4 26.♗d2 g5 then White gets a big advantage after 27.♕c2 h5 28.♘c3 ♘g6 29.♖cb1± since Black's kingside play is not threatening. White exerts strong pressure on the queenside, though it is not obvious how to exploit the advantage.

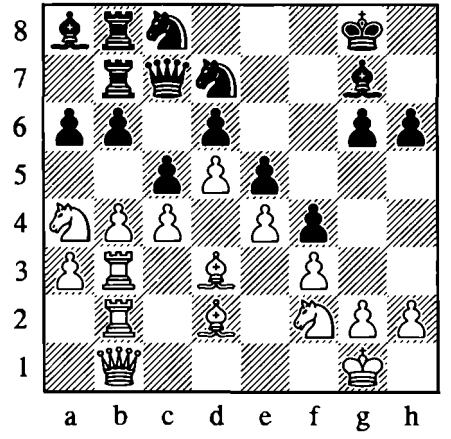
26.♖b3!

The beginning of a simple yet beautiful idea. White will triple his major pieces on the b-file, which will force Black's rook to return to b8, letting go of the tension on the kingside.

26...♔g8 27.♖c2 ♖fb8 28.♖cb2

Once again, the f5-pawn is under attack, but now Black has nothing better than pushing ...f5-f4.

28...f4 29.♗d2 ♘c8



30.♖c2

A good prophylactic move.

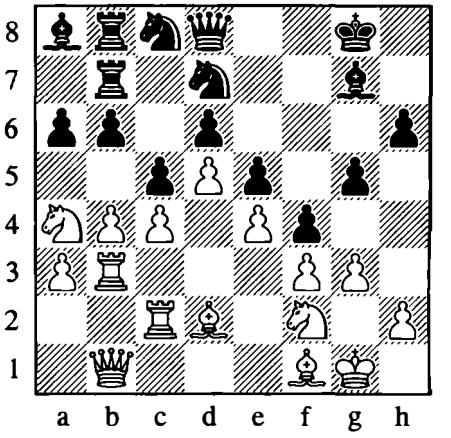
Instead 30.♗f1? would have allowed 30...b5! 31.♘c3 bxc4 32.♗xc4 cxb4 33.♖xb4 ♖xb4 34.♖xb4 ♖xb4 35.♕xb4 ♗b7± when Black is back in the game.

30...g5

The try 30...b5? now fails to 31.cxb5 axb5 32.♘xc5! dxc5 33.bxc5 threatening c5-c6, and now 33...♘xc5 34.♗b4 ♗f8 35.♖bc3 when White emerges a pawn up and with a decisive positional advantage.

31.♗f1 ♕d8 32.g3!±

Bringing the light-squared bishop into the game via h3, which demolishes all of Black's hopes to resist with passive defence. White's position is so solid he does not even need to worry about a kingside attack.



32...♘f8

More passive defence will soon lead Black's position to collapse.

Maybe it was time to attempt 32...b5!? though after 33.♘b2 ♕c7 34.♘fd3 Black must continue waiting, since both pawn captures worsen his position: 34...cxb4 35.axb4 bxc4 36.♘xc4 ♕d8 37.♘a5 ♖c7 38.♘c6+– or 34...bxc4 35.♘xc4 ♕d8 36.♗h3!?+–

33.♗h3 ♕e8 34.♘b2 ♖f7 35.♔g2

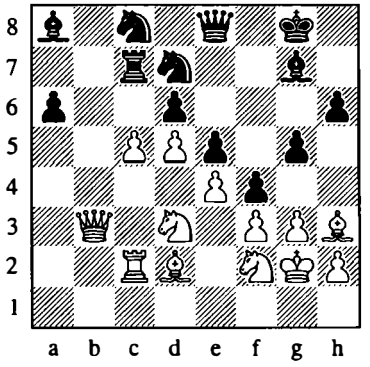
Protecting the f3-pawn.

35...♖c7 36.♘bd3

Threatening 37.bxc5 as 37...♖xc5 is no longer possible. According to my database this is the last move in the game, though if play had continued White would have realized his advantage very soon. I like the following continuation:

36...♖bb7

Or: 36...cxb4 37.axb4 ♘d7 38.c5! The decisive break. 38...bxc5 39.bxc5 ♖xb3 40.♕xb3



With winning queenside play, say after 40...dxc5 41.d6† c4 42.♖xc4 ♖xc4 43.♕xc4† ♔h7 44.♕c7.

37.bxc5 bxc5

Or: 37...dxc5 38.♗xc8 ♕xc8 39.♖xb6+–

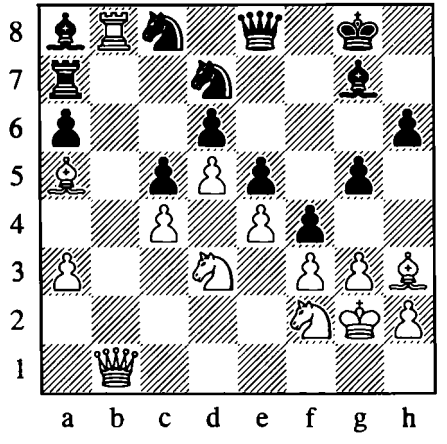
38.♖cb2

Gaining the b-file.

38...♖xb3 39.♖xb3 ♘d7 40.♗a5 ♖a7 41.♖b8!+–

Invading the 8th rank!

But not 41.♗xd7? ♕xd7 42.♖b8 due to 42...♖b7 when most of the advantage disappears.



41...♗f8

The point is that 41...♘xb8? loses to 42.♕xb8.

42.♗xd7 ♕xd7 43.♘g4 ♗g7

There should be many ways to impose the advantage, but I like the strong tactical blow:

44.♘gxe5! ♗xe5

44...dxe5 doesn't help either: 45.♘xc5 ♕e8 46.♗b6 ♖e7 47.♖xa8+–

45.♘xe5 dxe5 46.♕b6

Threatening ♖xc8, and now the game could have been over after the amusing variation:

46...♖b7 47.♕g6† ♔f8 48.♕xh6† ♔f7

Or 48...♔g8 49.♕xg5† ♔f8 50.♖xa8 and wins.

49.♕h7† ♔e8 50.♖xc8†! ♕xc8 51.♕g8† ♔d7 52.♕e6#

Final remarks

1. Black's 10...a6 weakened the b6-square permanently and this weakening proved important on many occasions throughout the game.
2. White took advantage of the b6-square when playing 13.♕b3, to threaten 14.bxc5 ♘xc5 15.♕b6.
3. Later, Black had to double rooks on the b-file precisely because the b6-square was weak, otherwise there would have been no entry points and Black's rooks could have stayed on the a- and f-files doing their jobs.
4. White's most remarkable move was 32.g3, bringing the light-squared bishop onto a powerful diagonal. This move however, only worked well because Black's forces were far from the kingside.
5. White's position after move 36 displays an ideal arrangement of his forces, and in fact Black's position is already desperate despite having a closed position and equal material. The rest is a matter of technique, and the sample variation offered is just an illustration of White's many winning methods.

Krishnan Sasikiran – Swayangsu Satyapragyan

Calcutta 2009

Learning objective: This game is an example of White's central break f2-f4, and the subsequent kingside attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e5 4.♘c3 d6 5.e4 ♗e7 6.g3 0–0 7.♗g2 ♘bd7 8.♘ge2 ♘e8 9.0–0 g6 10.♗h6 ♘g7

I was able to find 70 games with this position in my database, where White scored over 70%. This position was first played in 1961, and for a couple of decades it was used by strong players, such as Ivkov or Fedorov. Throughout the last decade, this position has essentially disappeared from master-level games, and today it is only rarely used by players with around a 2200 rating.

During this chapter we have learned about the solidity of Black's position, and the reader might be tempted to think this is always the case, but here we have a clear counterexample. Unlike previous games, Black's bishop is located on e7 instead of the desirable g7, and White's pieces are well arranged for the break f2-f4. As it turns out, Black is simply not prepared to meet this break, and White already has a serious advantage if he proceeds correctly.

11.♕d2

The most precise; this move and the next prepare the strong f2-f4 break.

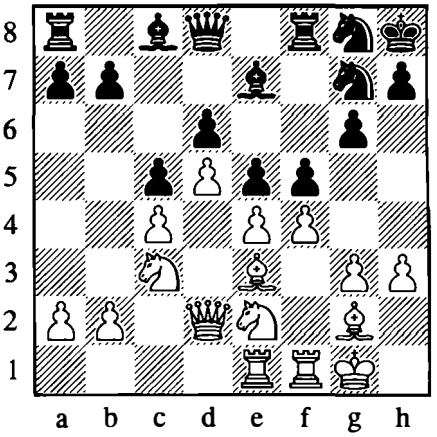
Another option was the direct 11.f4!? but after 11...exf4 12.gxf4 f5 the position is rather complex.

11...♔h8

Black is playing schematically; this move clears the g8-square for the knight manoeuvre ...♘f6-g8 chasing away White's bishop. This is conceptually good, but way too slow.

If 11...f5 then White can play in the spirit of the game Wojtaszek – Fedorov with 12.exf5 gxf5 13.f4!? e4 14.g4!± when White has promising attacking chances on the kingside.

12.♖ae1 ♘f6 13.h3 ♘g8 14.♗e3 f5 15.f4!±



15...♗f6

Black wants to recapture on e5 with his bishop in order to preserve a healthy pawn structure, but this is not the best approach, as Black's problems are far more serious than that.

A healthier option was 15...♘f6 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♖f2 when Black has severe structural problems, but is likely to put up some resistance. For example: 17...♖b8 (but not 17...b6? 18.exf5 gxf5 19.d6+–) 18.b3 a6 19.♘c1 ♗d6 20.♘d3 ♕c7± when White's position is much to be preferred, but Black is holding for now.

Previously 15...exf4 had been played, but after: 16.♗xf4 g5 17.♗e3 ♗f6 18.exf5 (18.♗f2!? preparing exf5 followed by g3-g4, also puts Black in serious trouble) 18...♘xf5 White has the simple 19.♘e4!? ♘xe3 20.♕xe3± when Black's position could collapse anytime.

16.fxe5 ♗xe5 17.♗f4!

A very important move; Sasikiran clears some lines and trades an important defensive piece.

17...♗xf4?!

After this trade the weak d6-pawn becomes an additional chronic problem which Black cannot cope with.

It was necessary to accept a weak pawn structure and play 17...♘f6 though after 18.♗xe5 dxe5 19.♕e3 ♘d7 20.exf5 gxf5 21.♘c1± White has a huge long-term advantage due to the weakened e5- and f5-pawns, as well as his strong protected passed pawn on d5.

18.♘xf4 fxe4

18...♗d7 helps little, since after 19.exf5! ♘xf5 20.♘e4 the threats ♕c3 or g4, followed by ♘xd6 decide the game: 20...♘f6 21.g4 ♘xe4 22.♗xe4 ♘h4 (not 22...♘g7? 23.♘xg6†! hxg6 24.♕h6† ♔g8 25.♗xg6+–) 23.♘e6 ♖xf1† 24.♖xf1 ♕e7 25.♘g5 Black's knight is essentially lost on h4.

19.g4!+–

Covering the f5-square, thus preventing Black's bishop and knight from coming into the game. Black is lost because he lacks mobility and development, and because White will develop multiple tactical threats against the d6-pawn, the e6-square and the king.

Also good enough was: 19.♘xe4 ♗f5 20.♘e6 ♘xe6 21.dxe6 ♗xe4 22.♕c3† ♖f6 23.♗xe4+–

19...e3

There is nothing better.

The natural-looking 19...♘f6 is refuted by 20.♘xg6†! hxg6 21.♕h6† when Black's forces are so poorly coordinated they cannot offer resistance despite having an extra piece. For example: 21...♘h7 22.♘xe4 (threatening ♘g5) 22...♔g8 23.♕xg6 ♖xf1† 24.♖xf1 ♕e7 25.♘xd6+– Threatening ♖f7 or ♗e4.

20.♖xe3 ♗d7

20...♘f6 is also inadequate due to 21.♘e6 ♗xe6 22.dxe6 ♕e7 23.♗xb7! since 23...♕xb7 loses to: 24.e7 ♖fe8 25.♖xf6 ♖xe7 26.♕xd6!+– ♖xe3? 27.♖f8† ♖xf8 28.♕xf8#

21.♘e4

The concrete threats begin; Black just does not have enough space to organize a defence.

21...♕c7

21...♕e7? loses to 22.♘xc5.

21...♗e8 loses after: 22.♘e6 ♖xf1† 23.♔xf1 ♕e7 (or 23...♘xe6 24.dxe6) 24.♘xg7 ♕xg7 (24...♔xg7 25.♘xc5 ♕f7† 26.♖f3) 25.♘xd6

22.♖ef3

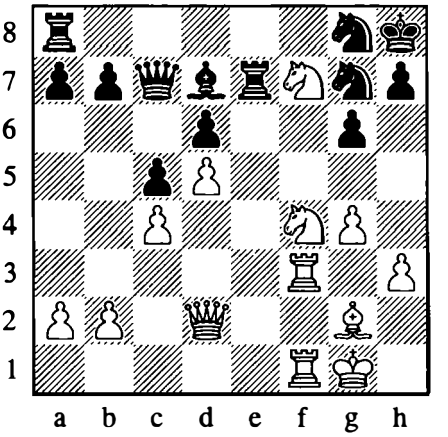
Threatening ♘xg6.

22...♖fe8 23.♘g5 ♖e7

Also hopeless is 23...♘h6 due to 24.♘xg6†! hxg6 25.♘e6! ♗xe6 26.♕xh6† ♔g8 27.dxe6.

24.♘f7†!

A very nice finish.



24...♖xf7 25.♘xg6† hxg6 26.♖xf7

Black resigns since he does not have a satisfactory defence against ♕c3xg7#.

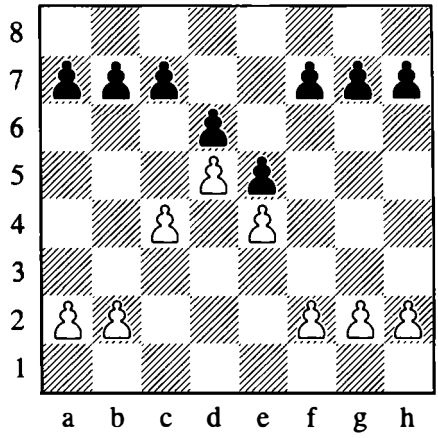
1–0

Final remarks

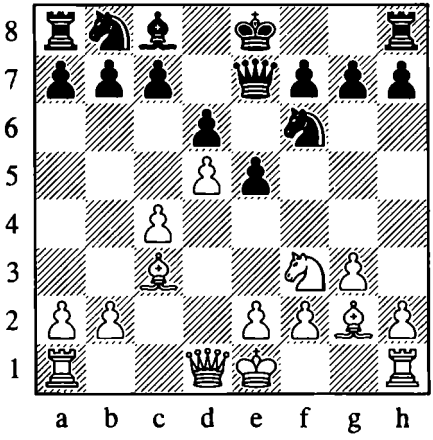
1. Once the e- and f-pawns are off the board, White will generally have an edge, though it could be small.
2. White's advantage is due to his spatial advantage, the vulnerable d6-pawn, and the e6-square. In this game White converted these factors into a beautiful win.

Chapter 16

KID Type III



This structure most commonly occurs in the King's Indian Defence, though it also arises from certain lines within the Bogo-Indian, such as: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♗b4† 4.♗d2 ♕e7 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.♘c3 ♗xc3 7.♗xc3 d6 8.♗g2 e5 9.d5 ♘b8



Something to notice about this position is how Black has already got rid of his dark-squared bishop, which is sometimes trapped within the pawn chain, thus this approach for reaching the King's Indian Type III structure deserves consideration. Nevertheless, throughout this chapter we will showcase only examples in which Black possesses his dark-squared bishop, although many of the ideas transfer without much alteration to the case where Black does not have this bishop.

This structure typically yields play on opposite flanks in the style of a 'chain-battle'. White will hit near the base of Black's chain (the d6-pawn) with c4-c5, while Black will attack near the base of White's chain (the e4-pawn) with ...f7-f5. White's attack is founded on gaining material on the queenside, while Black's aim will be to create a mating attack against White's king, which will often castle short in this structure.

White's plans

1. Break on the queenside with c4-c5xd6 and later invade down the c-file.
2. Expand on the queenside with c4-c5-c6, and if Black replies with ...b7-b6, then invade down the a-file after a2-a4-a5xb6.
3. First block the kingside with g2-g4, and only then proceed with the above queenside plans.
4. If Black allows it, respond to ...f7-f5 with ♘g5-e6; although similar to the previous chapter, Black is unlikely to allow White to do this under favourable conditions.
5. Trade light-squared bishops so as to reduce Black's attacking potential.

Black's plans

1. Create a kingside attack with ...f7-f5-f4 and later ...g6-g5-g4-g3, or ...gxf3 attacking the f3-pawn, which becomes the new base of the chain.

2. Obtain counterplay with ...f7-f5xe4 followed by action down the f-file and/or attacking the base of the chain (the e4-pawn).
3. In some cases, play ...h7-h5-h4 and even ...♗g7-h6 to make use of the otherwise trapped bishop on g7.
4. Play ...c7-c6 to create central tension and possibly transpose into a King's Indian Type I structure.
5. Play ...c7-c5 to slow down White's queenside play and transpose into a King's Indian Type II structure.

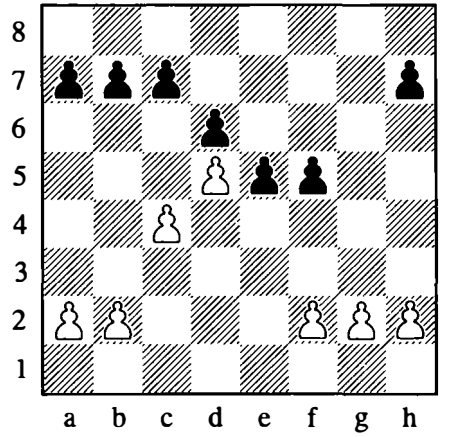
White's Plans 1 and 2 are by far the most common, while Black's Plan 1 is certainly the most common reply, although in many variations Black will choose any of the remaining four plans he has. Black's Plan 3 is particularly common in the Petrosian variation, and we will see an example of this.

Similarly to the previous chapter, White always has the option to reply to ...f7-f5 with exf5, transforming the structure, when Black may either recapture on f5 with a piece or a pawn. These structure transformations are mentioned separately at the beginning of the chapter.

The first four examples in this chapter are devoted to the structure transformation after White captures exf5. The first two are about Black's ...gxf5 reply while the remaining two consider the case when Black recaptures on f5 with a piece. Then we briefly discuss how pieces are typically arranged once Black has played ...f5-f4, after which we study one example of Black's Plan 1.

Note that Black's light-squared bishop plays a major role, both protecting light squares and helping in the attack. In fact, the subsequent example in this chapter (Azarov – Volke) shows how Black's attack loses its strength once the light-squared bishops are off the board. The remaining two games examine White's Plan 3. The first of these is a successful implementation, while the second is a great example of how Black should react. Essentially all the plans mentioned above are present in these examples, either within the game itself or within the analysis.

Transformation A



Similarly to the previous chapter, the recapture ...gxf5 seems healthier, keeping control of the e4-square and opening the g-file for a kingside attack. A disadvantage of this recapture is that Black's kingside could become vulnerable, as we will see in the next example.

Also in similar style to the previous chapter, White will often advance his f-pawn to either f3 or f4, giving rise to different types of games. The games will develop similarly to those games from the previous chapter, namely Piorun – Hillarp Persson in which White played f2-f3, and Wojtaszek – Fedorov in which White played f2-f4. This time around White will get a good position from playing f2-f3 in the first example, and a bad position from playing f2-f4 in the second case – the exact opposite to the previous chapter. The reader should not attempt to draw general conclusions about whether f2-f3 or f2-f4 is always the best reply. Instead, he should observe how the arrangement of pieces and the circumstances of each game determine which continuation is best.

Black's vulnerable kingside

The following is an example of when White should play f2-f3 against Black's ...gxf5 recapture. The reader should take the previous chapter's games as a reference when studying this game.

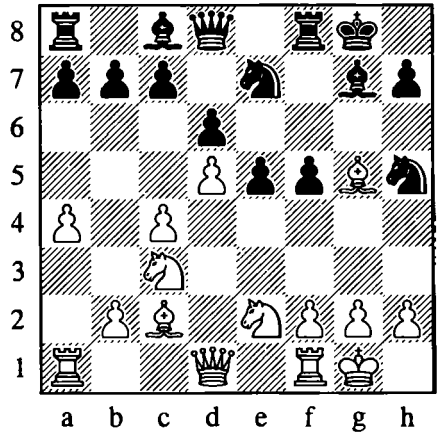
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗d3 0–0 6.♘ge2 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♘h5 8.♗c2 e5 9.d5 ♘e7 10.a4 f5 11.exf5 gxf5

So far we have closely followed the theory, and now we are in the structure of interest. In contrast to the game **Wojtaszek – Fedorov** from the previous chapter, White's bishop is on c2, rather than g2. Hence, playing f2-f3 makes far more sense now.

12.♗g5

This occupies a good diagonal in order to obstruct Black's plans.

If 12.f4 the bishop on c2 becomes blocked with 12...e4! 13.♗e3 ♘f6 14.h3 c5!? when it is clear that White's kingside or queenside breaks are not easy to carry out. For example, if White insists on a kingside break, then after 15.♕d2 b6 16.♔h2 ♕e8 17.♖g1 ♕g6 18.g3 ♗d7 19.♘d1 h5 20.♘f2 a6!?∓ Black gains queenside counterplay with ...b6-b5 before White accomplishes anything on the kingside.



12...h6

The careless 12...f4? hoping for f4-f3, is refuted by 13.♘d4! which wins after: 13...exd4 (or 13...♘f6 14.♘e6 ♗xe6 15.dxe6 ♕c8 16.♘d5! ♘exd5 17.cxd5) 14.♕xh5 ♗f5 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♗xf5

13.♗h4 ♕e8 14.f3!

An ideal move, clearing the f2-square for the bishop and keeping Black from playing ...e5-e4.

14...♘g6 15.♗f2

And now we have a critical position. Black needs to find active play to counter White's queenside expansion. A possible continuation is:

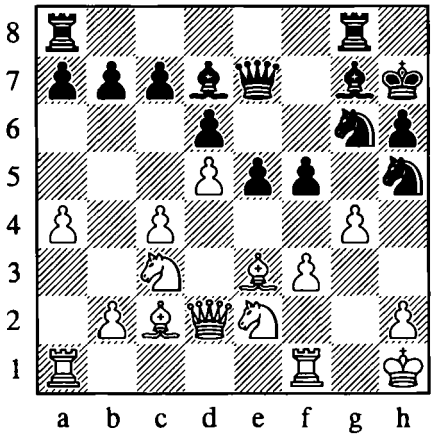
15...♕e7

In the game Sokolov – Stellwagen, Netherlands (ch) 2004, Black chose 15...♘gf4 but after 16.♘xf4 ♘xf4 17.♗e3 ♕g6 18.♕d2 the position would have been similar to the main line, and Black's kingside play is not really getting anywhere.

16.♔h1 ♗d7 17.♕d2 ♔h7 18.♗e3 ♖g8

Black is hoping for a kingside attack down the g-file, but after:

19.g4!



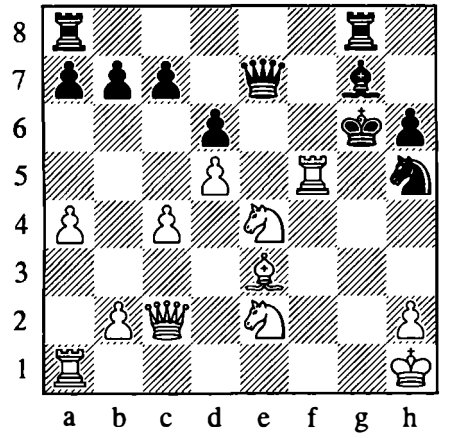
It is Black who faces kingside problems since White is winning after:

19...fxg4
Or: 19...♘f6 20.gxf5 ♘h4 21.♘g3+–

20.fxg4 ♗xg4 21.♗xg6†! ♔xg6 22.♕c2†
The b1-h7 diagonal proves to be decisive, and the game could finish with:

22...e4 23.♘xe4
Threatening ♘f6†.

23...♗f5 24.♖xf5!



24...♔xf5 25.♘4g3† ♔g4 26.♕f5† ♔h4 27.♕xh5#

Final remarks

1. What the reader should remember from this example is the combination between White's bishops on c2 and e3, and the move f2-f3. If either bishop was missing, this set-up would be far less effective. For example, in the game Piorun – Hillarp Persson from the previous chapter, White's bishop was not on e3 therefore he could not prevent the knight transfer to f4.
2. White's g2-g4 break requires precise calculation, but is not quite as uncommon as it might seem. It works well together with a bishop on c2.

Salvijus Bercys – Mauricio Flores Rios

Internet Chess Club 2009

Learning objectives:
1. This game illustrates Black's plan ...h6-h5 followed by ...♗h6 to activate the dark-squared bishop.
2. Later, this game turns into a King's Indian Type III-A structure, and this game serves as an example of Black's ideal play for this pawn formation.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.c4 ♗g7 4.♘c3 0–0 5.e4 d6 6.♗e2 e5 7.d5
This is known as the Petrosian system against the King's Indian.

7...a5 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h4 ♘a6 10.♘d2 ♕e8 11.a3
Preparing b2-b4.

11...♗d7
The imprecise 11...♘h7?! allows 12.b4! since after 12...axb4 13.axb4 the b4-pawn is immune due to the a-file pin.

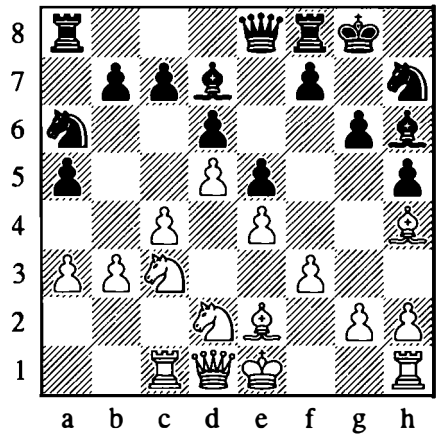
12.b3
If 12.0–0 White must be aware of the possibility of 12...a4!? preventing White's queenside expansion, since 13.b4? (instead 13.♘b5!? deserves attention) 13...axb3 14.♘xb3 is a very undesirable structure transformation for White, because the queenside pawns lose mobility.

12...♘h7 13.♖c1?!
In this variation the rook does not work so well on the c-file.

The standard line would be 13.♖b1 h5 14.f3 ♗h6 15.0–0 ♗e3† which is very similar to the game, but with an extra tempo in many lines, as White is ready to play b3-b4 next move.

13...h5 14.f3
14.0–0? loses a piece after 14...g5 15.♗g3 h4.

14...♗h6



So far both players have been following standard opening moves; now White has to make an important decision.

15.0–0

The alternative is 15.♗f2 but in this case 15...♕e7! 16.0–0 h4 and White's queenside play is far slower than Black's attack. For example: 17.♖c2 ♗f4 18.♖b2 ♕g5 19.♔h1 ♘f6 20.♕e1 ♔g7! Bringing a rook to the h-file, and now: 21.♗d3 (21.♗xh4 ♕h6! followed by ...♖h8 with an attack) 21...♖h8 22.♘e2 ♘h5!? 23.♗xh4 ♕h6 Black's attack is very promising.

15...♗e3† 16.♗f2

Another option is 16.♔h1!? f5 though Black is doing well after 17.♕c2 (or 17.exf5 gxf5 is similar to the game) 17...g5 18.♗f2 ♗xf2 19.♖xf2 f4 followed by ...g5-g4.

16...♗xf2† 17.♖xf2 f5 18.exf5 gxf5

The alternative 18...♗xf5 is analyzed separately after this game.

19.f4

A standard reply, attempting to fix Black's centre and attacking the h5-pawn.

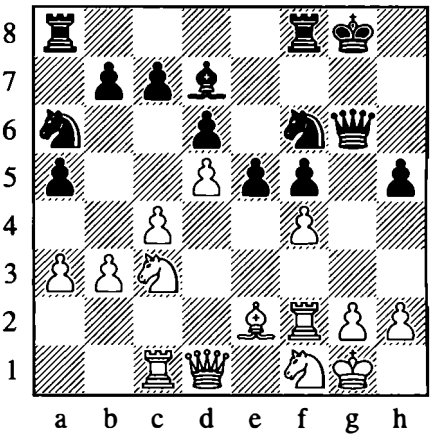
Unlike the previous example, if White continues with 19.♖b1 ♕g6 20.b4 axb4 21.axb4 h4 22.♗d3 ♘f6 Black is doing well after ...♘h5-f4. The key is that White does not have a bishop on e3 to guard the f4-square, and also that Black has a threatening h4-pawn.

19...♘f6 20.♘f1

Black is doing well after 20.fxe5 dxe5, though the resulting structure is less relevant to our study.

20...♕g6

Defining the structure immediately with 20...e4!? has the drawback of leaving the knight on a6 out of the game. For example, 21.♖b1 ♕g6 22.b4 ♔h8 23.♘e3 ♖g8 24.♕d4± and White has a nice and solid position.



21.h3?!

Preventing ...♘g4, but seriously weakening the g3-square.

Better was 21.fxe5 dxe5 22.d6!? c6 with a dynamic balance.

21...♘c5!

This move is natural and strong, bringing the knight into the game and heading towards the weak g3-square.

22.♖f3

Now 22.fxe5 dxe5∓ doesn't help since Black has many potential threats such as ...♔h8 and ...♖g8 followed by ...♘ce4, or ...f5-f4 followed by ...♗xh3.

22...♔h8

An ideal opportunity to create threats down the g-file.

23.b4

If 23.♖g3 ♕h6 24.fxe5 h4! 25.♖e3 f4 26.♖f3 dxe5∓ and Black has great attacking prospects.

23...axb4 24.axb4 ♘ce4 25.♘xe4 ♘xe4

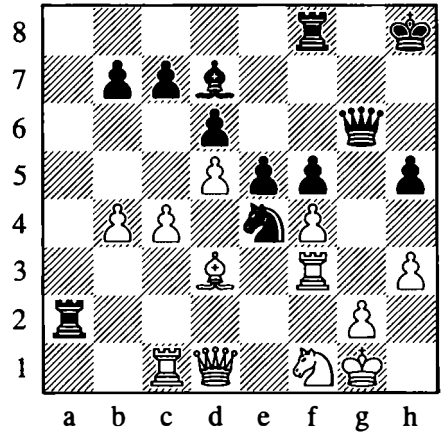
Somewhat better was 25...fxe4!? 26.♖g3 ♕f5 27.fxe5 h4! 28.♖gc3 ♕xe5∓ when Black has good chances for a kingside attack.

26.♗d3?

Making things easier for Black.

Much better was 26.♕c2! preventing 26...♖a2, though after 26...exf4 27.♖xf4 ♕h6 28.♖f3 ♕g7!∓ Black has a promising kingside attack.

26...♖a2!



27.♗c2

White loses material after 27.♖c2? ♗a4! 28.♕b1 ♘c3! – the key move.

27...♖g8 28.♘e3

White is already losing after: 28.♕e2? exf4! Threatening 29...♘g5, and 29.♖xf4 is met by 29...♕g5! pinning the rook! 30.♕f3 ♖a3! 31.♘e3 ♖xe3–+

28...♖a3

Threatening 29...♖xe3 because of the mate on g2.

29.♕e2 ♘g3 30.♕d2 e4

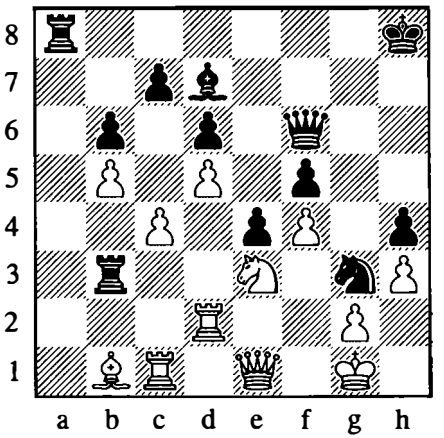
Finally it is a good moment to define the central chain, since Black's knight is now on the superb g3-square, instead of the poor a6-square.

Even stronger though is: 30...exf4! 31.♖xf4 ♕g5 32.♕d4† ♖g7 33.♖e1 ♘e4! (threatening ...♕xf4 and ...♖xe3) 34.♖xe4 fxe4 35.♗xe4 ♗xh3–+

31.♖f2 ♕f6 32.♗b1 ♖ga8 33.♕e1 h4

Reinforcing control of the g3-square.

34.♖d2 ♖b3 35.b5 b6!∓



And we have a dream position for Black in this transformed King's Indian Type III-A, for the following reasons:

1. Black has full control of the a-file.
2. Black has a strong knight on g3, ideally supported by the h4-pawn.
3. White's f4-pawn is practically isolated and vulnerable.
4. White does not have any reactions on the queenside.

36.♘c2

Unfortunately, at this point time trouble began and I spoiled my position. The game however, could have finished very nicely with the variation:

36...♖c3!?

Or 36...e3! 37.♘xe3 ♖e8 38.♖d3 ♖xd3 39.♗xd3 ♕d4 winning a piece.

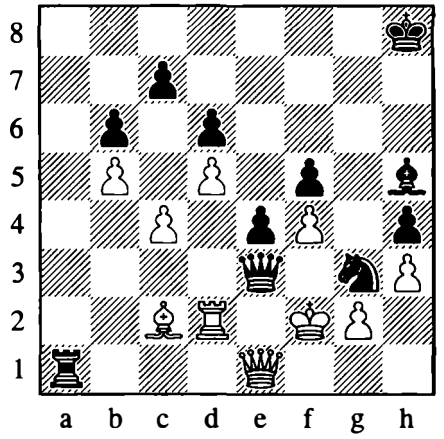
Instead I played 36...♖a4?! and later blundered and made a draw.

37.♘e3 ♖aa3 38.♖xc3 ♕xc3 39.♔f2 ♗e8!→

Heading to h5, bringing the last piece into the game, while White is paralyzed.

40.♖d1 ♕b2† 41.♖d2 ♕b3 42.♖d1 ♗h5 43.♖d2 ♖a1 44.♗c2 ♕xe3†!

A nice final blow.



45.♕xe3

Or 45.♔xe3 ♖xe1† wins simply.

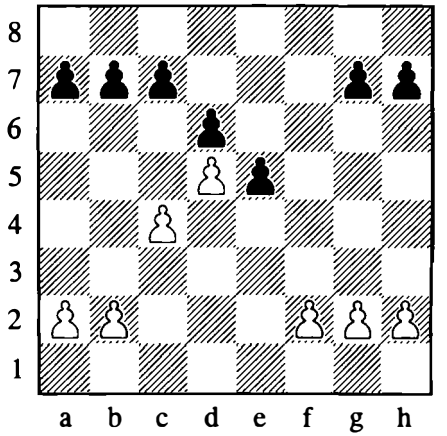
45...♘h1#

It's a shame I missed the opportunity to finish off the game with a fun variation like this one.

Final remarks

1. White's main problem in this position was losing control of the g3-square. As we may recall from the game Wojtaszek – Fedorov from the previous chapter, White's kingside break g3-g4 was very strong, and not having such a plan in this position is already disappointing.
2. Black's key move was 21...♘c5, bringing the knight into the game, heading towards g3, before closing the central structure with ...e5-e4.
3. White's imprecise play allowed Black to gain crucial tempos on moves 26-30, helping Black achieve his dream position.
4. Once Black installed his knight on g3 and doubled rooks on the a-file, there was essentially nothing White could hope for, and the sample variation I chose to finish off this game illustrates that.

Transformation B



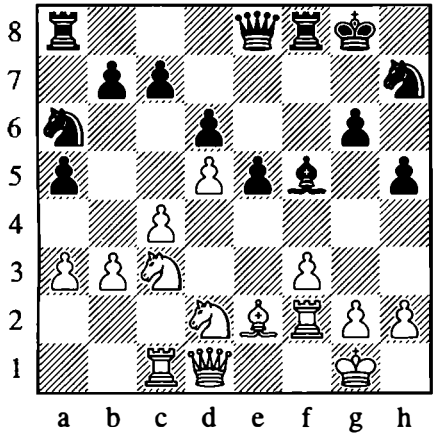
As in the previous chapter, when Black recaptures on f5 with a piece, White obtains an outpost on e4. White's main plan in this position will be to place a well-supported knight on e4 and later break on the queenside with c4-c5 securing an advantage.

Black's counterplay will be based on kingside action; among his potential plans are the following:

1. Place a knight on f4 (or maybe d4), to create tactical threats.
2. Play ...g6-g5-g4 to pressure White's f-pawn (which is likely to be on f3) and then open lines for attack.
3. Fight for control of the e4-square by placing a bishop on f5 and a knight on f6.

As we learned in the previous chapter, in the example Mareco – Bachmann, White's position is much the more favourable if light-squared bishops are off the board, because it is easier to control the e4-square, and because Black's dark-squared bishop can turn into a terribly bad bishop, as it did in that game. In this chapter we will repeat this idea, which remains valid.

White's knight controls e4



If Black had taken 18...♗xf5 instead of 18...gxf5 in the game Bercys – Flores Rios, we would have reached a King's Indian Type III-B structure in which White easily controls the e4-square after:

19.♘de4±

Consequently White stands somewhat better. To see why this is the case, I offer the following variation:

19...♕e7

If 19...h4 the direct 20.c5!? ♘xc5 21.♘xc5 dxc5 22.♗c4 ♔g7 23.♕e1!± secures an advantage for White as the e5-pawn will fall after ♖e2xe5.

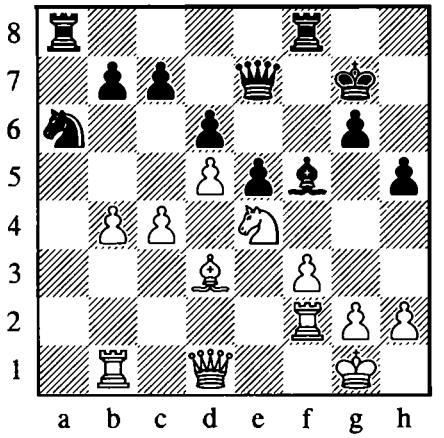
20.♗d3

Reinforcing e4.

20...♘f6

Worse is 20...♖f7 21.♕d2 ♖af8 22.♖b1 g5 23.b4 axb4 24.axb4 when Black's position is near collapse due to the threat of c4-c5. For example: 24...♗xe4 (or 24...g4 25.fxg4 hxg4 26.♕h6!+–) 25.♘xe4 g4 26.♕h6! gxf3 27.♕xh5 fxg2 28.♖xg2† When it is White who has a winning kingside attack.

21.♖b1 ♘xe4 22.♘xe4 ♔g7 23.b4 axb4 24.axb4±



Black's knight is out of play and White will soon carry out the desired c4-c5 break, while Black is unable to create serious kingside threats. Let's see what happens to an optimistic approach:

24...g5?!

Such play is more likely to backfire than it is to succeed, for example:

25.♕e2 ♗g6

Or 25...♖f7? 26.♘g3! ♗xd3 27.♕xd3 winning material due to the threats ♘xh5 and ♘f5.

26.♕e3 ♔h8 27.♖a2±

Black's g5- and h5-pawns are more liabilities than strengths. White's queenside play will proceed with c4-c5 gaining a big advantage.

Olivier Renet – Anish Giri

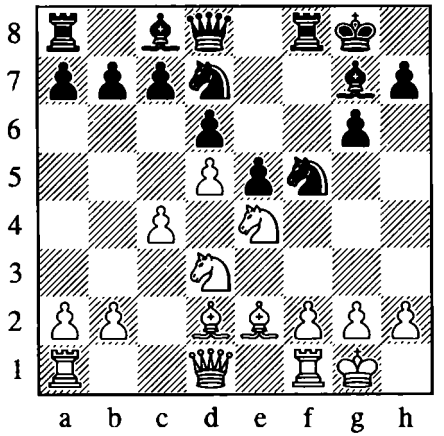
Mulhouse 2011

Learning objective: By contrast with the previous game fragment, this game teaches us how Black may create kingside counterplay by fighting for the e4-square, expanding on the kingside, and eventually achieving the ...g5-g4 break.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0–0 6.♘f3 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘e1 ♘d7 10.♘d3 f5 11.♗d2 fxe4

A more popular alternative is 11...♘f6 which is examined in the last game of this chapter.

12.♘xe4 ♘f5



We have reached the position of interest and so far both players have followed theory closely, but now White deviates with:

13.♖c1

This supports c4-c5 in order to gain queenside play. The position is typical, though not very deeply explored by theory, and it is a good moment to assess the situation. As we know, White desires to obtain firm control of the e4-square, and he will accomplish this after 14.f3 and 15.♘df2. Hence, it makes sense for Black to begin fighting for the e4-square immediately. White was more likely to secure a tiny advantage after 13.f3 ♘f6 14.♘df2 ♘d4 15.♗d3 with good control of the e4-square. For example, 15...♘h5 16.♖e1 ♘f4 17.♗f1± when White's kingside remains solid and he may proceed with 18.♗c3 to expel the knight from d4.

13...♘f6!

Getting ahead of White's consolidating moves f2-f3 and ♘df2.

An alternative was 13...b6!? preventing c4-c5, and if White insists with 14.b4?! then 14...♘f6 15.♗g5 a5!? 16.a3 axb4 17.axb4 ♘d4∓ when it is pretty clear that White's c4-c5 break will not yield much.

14.♗g5

If 14.♘xf6† ♕xf6 the threat is ...e5-e4, and after 15.♗f3 ♘d4 16.♗e4 ♗f5! (again fighting for e4) 17.♖e1 c5!? Black has equalized. He may follow up with ...g6-g5-g4 and possibly ...♗h6 afterwards, trading his 'bad' bishop.

Also 14.f3 ♘xe4 15.fxe4 ♘d4 yields an approximately level position after: 16.♖xf8† ♗xf8 17.♗e3 ♕h4 18.♘f2 ♗d7!?

14...h6 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6

White retains his control of e4 at the cost of giving up his dark-squared bishop, hence becoming vulnerable on the dark squares.

16.♗g4 b6

Preventing c4-c5.

White was probably hoping for 16...♘d4 17.♗xc8 ♕xc8 trading Black's valuable light-squared bishop, and now 18.c5± secures a small advantage for White due to the creation of a weakness on d6.

17.♖c3?!

This is not exactly a mistake, but it is certainly the beginning of an unnatural plan.

The alternative was 17.♕d2 a5 18.f3 ♗g7 when

Black has good counterplay associated with ...h6-h5 and ...♗h6, but White may attempt a slow expansion with 19.b3!? following up with a2-a3 and b3-b4 (or 19.♘df2 h5 20.♗xf5 ♗xf5 21.♘g5 ♗h6 22.h4 with level chances).

If White insists on c4-c5 with 17.b4 then 17...a5! 18.a3 axb4 19.axb4 and Black has a good position after 19...♗g5!? 20.♖a1 ♖xa1 21.♕xa1 h5 22.♗xf5 ♗xf5.

17...a5

Preventing b2-b4; it will be difficult and slow for White to create queenside play after this.

18.♘e1 ♗g7 19.♘c2 h5

This is a standard move, expanding on the kingside and clearing the h6-square for the bishop.

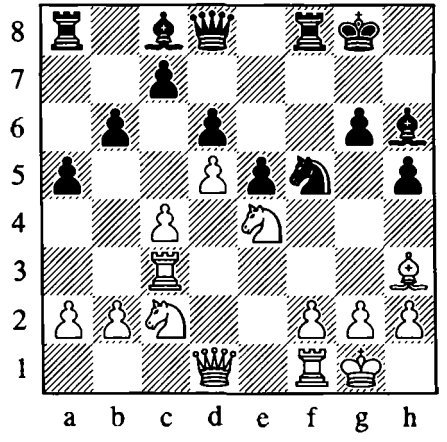
20.♗h3

If 20.♗xf5?! gxf5 Black gains good control of key central squares: 21.♘g3 (or 21.♘d2 h4∓) 21...h4 22.♘h5 f4!? 23.♘xg7 ♔xg7∓ Black has good attacking prospects on the kingside.

Also 20.♗e2 ♕h4 21.♗d3 ♗d7, followed by doubling rooks on the f-file, gives Black a pleasant position.

20...♗h6

Now Black's bad bishop moves onto a very good diagonal, and his position is at least equal.



21.♖e1 ♔h7

Black progresses slowly, while White is running out of ideas and natural plans to implement.

22.♘g3

Attempting a queenside expansion with 22.b3 ♗d7 23.a3 does not really help since after 23...♕e7 planning to double rooks on the f-file, White cannot play 24.b4?! due to the unpleasant: 24...axb4 25.axb4 ♗a4 26.♕e2 ♗xc2 27.♕xc2 ♘d4∓

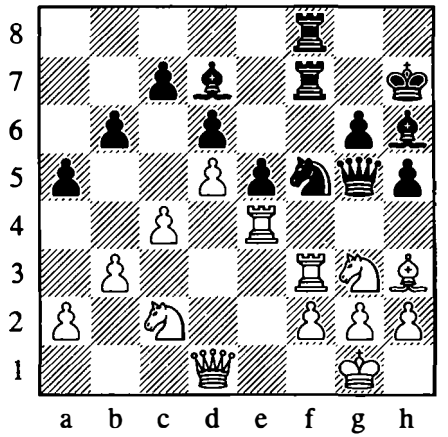
22...♕g5 23.♖f3 ♗d7 24.b3 ♖f7 25.♖e4?!

This rook has nothing to do on e4.

More logical was 25.a3 ♖af8 26.♘e4 ♕e7 27.♖d3 keeping an eye on the h5-pawn, preventing ...g6-g5; now 27...b5!? gives Black good fighting chances on both flanks.

25...♖af8∓

Black has doubled rooks on the f-file, while White's artificial piece arrangement does little for his position.



26.♖e1 ♕e7

An interesting alternative was 26...♕d2!? 27.♕xd2 ♗xd2 28.♖d1 ♗h6 since White's pieces are poorly arranged on h3, g3 and f3, and in fact there are no natural moves for White. For example: 29.♘e4? (29.♖f1 allows 29...b5!?∓ creating a new front of attack; and 29.♘xf5?!

gxf5∓ is just unpleasant) Black now wins with 29...g5 30.♗xf5† ♗xf5 31.♖e1 g4 32.♖d3 ♗xe4 33.♖xe4 ♖xf2.

27.♘e4 ♗f4

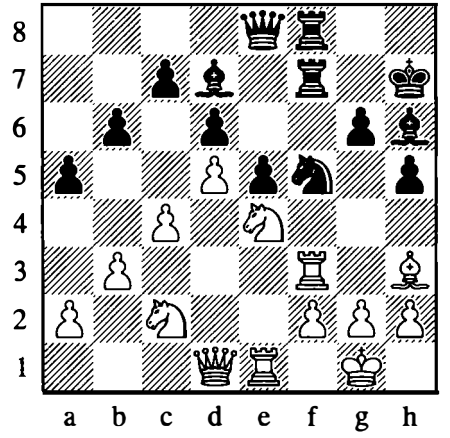
Preparing ...g6-g5.

28.♖d3 ♗h6 29.♖f3 ♕e8

Protecting the h5-pawn, preparing ...g6-g5.

The optimistic 29...g5? is met by 30.♖xf5! ♗xf5 31.♗xf5† ♖xf5 32.♕xh5 when Black is an exchange up for a pawn, but White has undisputed control of the e4-square and the light squares, giving him reasonable counterplay.

Of course Black is not interested in repeating moves with: 29...♗f4?!



30.a4?

This move is bad for two reasons:

1. It permanently removes the possibility of a2-a3, b3-b4 and c4-c5, which is White's only plan on the queenside.
2. It allows Black's strong reply 30...g5.

It was necessary to prevent ...g6-g5 for the moment with 30.♖d3, but after 30...♖g7 the threat ...g6-g5-g4 gives White some difficulties. A possible continuation is 31.♕e2 g5 32.g3 g4 33.♗g2 h4∓ when Black is calling the shots on the kingside, while White's queenside play is still on standby.

30...g5!∓

Threatening ...g5-g4, forcing White to give away his light-squared bishop.

31.♗xf5† ♗xf5

Now Black is ready to embark on a kingside expansion, and even dispute the control of the e4-square. White's position is rather aimless.

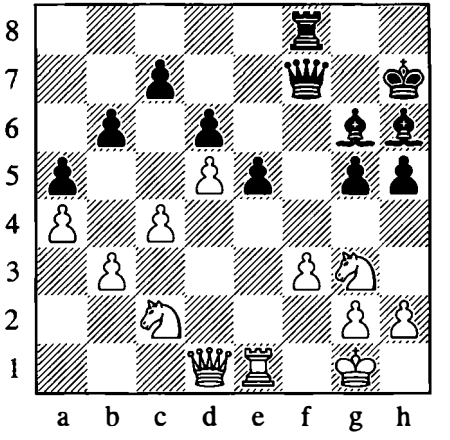
32.♘g3 ♗g6 33.♖xf7†

Heading towards e6 with 33.♘d4? fails to the simple: 33...g4! 34.♖xf7† ♕xf7 35.♘e6 ♕xf2†–+

33...♕xf7 34.f3?

Making things much easier for Black.

A better defence was 34.♕e2 though after 34...g4!? 35.♘e3 ♕f4 36.♖d1 ♔g7 37.♘gf1 ♗g5 Black has a big advantage due to the many potential threats, such as ...h5-h4-h3, or ...h5-h4 followed by ...g4-g3.

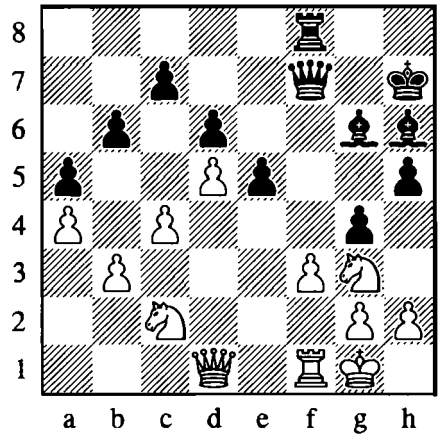


34...g4!–+

The beginning of the end; note how all of Black's pieces contribute to the attack.

35.♖f1

Other moves lose on the spot. For example, 35.fxg4? loses a piece to 35...♕f2† 36.♔h1 ♗xc2.



35...♔h8!?

A nice move, clearing the h7-square for the queen, and preparing to meet 36.fxg4 with 36...♗xc2.

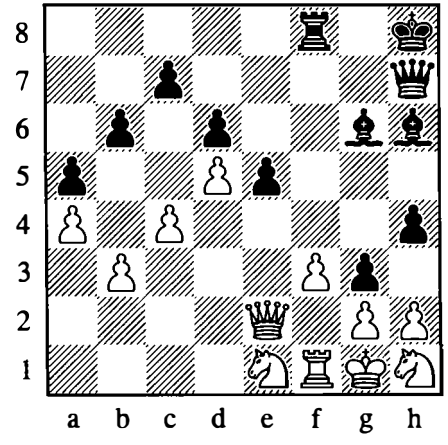
35...gxf3 36.♖xf3 ♗f4∓ followed by ...h5-h4 was good too.

36.♕e2

The try 36.fxg4? is met by 36...♗xc2! 37.♕xc2 (or 37.♖xf7 ♗xd1–+) 37...♗e3† 38.♔h1 ♕xf1† 39.♘xf1 ♖xf1#

If 36.♘a3 h4 37.fxg4 (or 37.♘e2 ♗e3† 38.♔h1 h3!–+) 37...♗e3†! 38.♔h1 hxg3! 39.♖xf7 ♖xf7 when Black wins nicely after: 40.♕e2 (40.hxg3? ♖h7#) 40...♗c5 41.♘b5 ♖f2 42.♕e1 ♗e4

36...♕h7 37.♘e1 h4 38.♘h1 g3!



If White does not allow the kingside to be opened, his knight will be trapped on h1 forever.

39.hxg3

If 39.h3 e4 Black is basically a piece up, whereas opening the position decides the game on the spot.

39...hxg3 40.♘xg3 ♗f4

White is helpless and the rest is rather simple.

41.♘h1

If 41.♔f2 then 41..♖g8 threatening ...♗xg3 followed by ...♗d3, and now 42.♘h1 e4 with a winning attack.

41...♕h2† 42.♔f2 e4 43.♖g1

43.fxe4? loses immediately: 43...♕h4† 44.g3 ♗xg3† 45.♔e3 (or 45.♔g1 ♖xf1† 46.♕xf1 ♕h2#) 45...♕xe4† 46.♔d2 ♗xe1† 47.♔xe1 ♕b1†

43..♖e8 44.♔f1 exf3 45.♕b2† ♔h7

White resigns. The f3-pawn cannot be taken since 46.♘xf3 loses to 46...♗d3† 47.♔f2 ♗e3†.

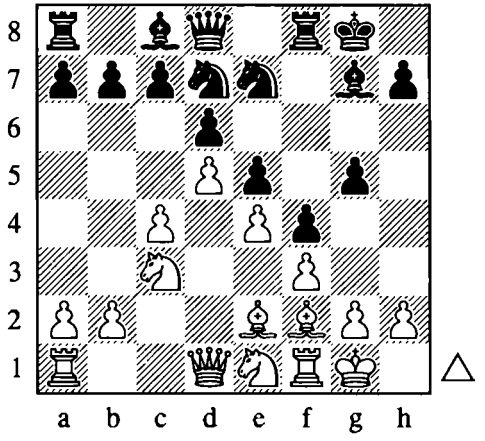
0–1

Final remarks

1. One of Black's most important moves was 13...♘f6 forcing White to choose between giving up his e4-square or giving up his dark squares, as he did in the game.
2. Later, the control of the e4-square played a significant role. As the reader may have noticed, White's position began to fall apart once his knight was forced out of e4, on move 32.
3. As we could observe in this game, Black should have good fighting chances along the f-file as long as he can control the c4-c5 break with pawns on a5 and b6, as he did in the game.

Piece Arrangement – after Black plays ...f5-f4

Previously we have studied what happens when White responds to ...f7-f5 by capturing exf5. Assuming White does not do so, then Black will probably push ...f5-f4, yielding the position we are about to study now. I would like to discuss how Black should arrange his pieces in one of the most typical situations where this structure will arise.



The position in this diagram has arisen in nearly 3000 database games, and although it is clear White will play on the queenside and Black will play for a mating attack, it remains an open question how exactly these plans should be carried out. Let's consider the relatively classical approach:

13.♘d3

Preparing the c4-c5 break.

Nowadays many players prefer 13.♖c1 ♘g6 14.c5!? ♘xc5 15.b4 ♘a6 16.♘b5 with a complex position you will find in many opening books.

Or 13.g4!? giving rise to a type of position we will examine in the last two examples.

And here is the piece arrangement I would like to discuss. Today's typical continuation for Black would be:

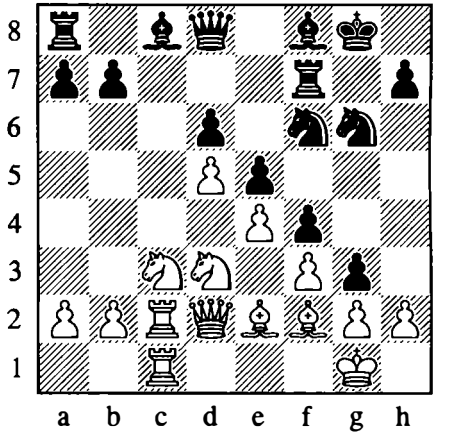
13...♘f6

A far less popular plan is 13...♖f6!? to follow with ...♖h6 and ...♕e8-h5.

14.c5 ♘g6 15.♖c1 ♖f7

This is a key move! It will be followed by ...♗f8 and ...♖g7. This idea was introduced in the early 1950's and is still used today. The point is to cover the c7-square from White's invasion cxd6 followed by ♘b5-c7. At the same time, Black's bishop protects the d6-pawn and the rook on g7 will support a kingside attack. And now after the continuation:

16.♖c2 ♗f8 17.cxd6 cxd6 18.♕d2 g4 19.♖fc1 g3!?



We see a pawn sacrifice that is typical and frequently used by King's Indian players. The point of this sacrifice is to open the f- and g-files, create kingside activity, and distract White's forces from their already-advanced queenside play. This sacrifice was first introduced in the game **Taimanov – Najdorf** from the Candidates of 1953. That game continued:

20.hxg3 fxg3 21.♗xg3 ♘h5 22.♗h2 ♗e7

Black had excellent compensation for the material, and went on to win the game very convincingly. The rest of this game can be found in the database, or in many classical King's Indian books.

Mads Andersen – Krisztian Szabo

Budapest 2013

Learning objective: In this game we see the power of Black's kingside attack based on the ...g6-g5-g4-g3 plan.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7

This is the beginning of one of the most analyzed (and most interesting) openings in the history of chess. It is known as the Mar del Plata variation, and has a history that dates back to the 1940's. Among its early developers were Najdorf, Gligoric, Petrosian and many others. Many of their ideas are still used in today's games. I will go through the opening phase without making too many comments for a simple reason: there exist very extensive treatments of this variation already, and any amount of comment here would be superficial.

9.♘e1 ♘e8

The knight moves to e8 to cover the c7-square against a future threat consisting of ♖c1, cxd6 and ♘b5-c7.

An alternative is 9...♘d7 and after 10.♗e3 f5 11.f3 f4 12.♗f2 g5 13.♘d3 we reach the position mentioned before this game, where we discussed one of Black's ideal piece set-ups.

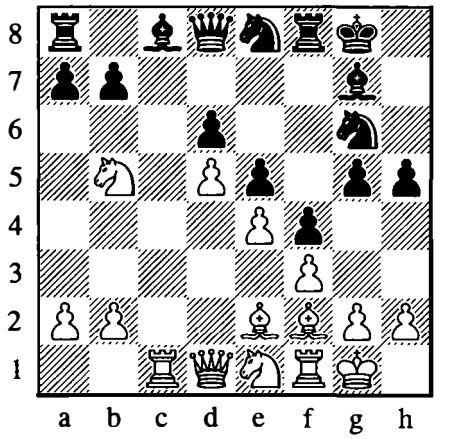
10.♗e3 f5 11.f3 f4 12.♗f2 h5 13.c5 g5 14.♖c1

A far more common alternative is: 14.a4!?

14...♘g6 15.cxd6 cxd6 16.♘b5

At this point we are essentially outside the opening book, and we can begin the analysis of the game.

Previously 16.a4 ♗h6 17.♘d3 ♗d7 18.♘b5 a6 19.♘a3 had been played in the game Mchedlishvili – Rapport, Plovdiv 2012, but after 19...g4 Black has good counterplay.



16...a6

In some similar positions, Black just plays 16...♖f7 and after 17.♘xa7 ♗d7 the kingside attack keeps on going, but this is *not* one of those cases, as after 18.a4 ♗h6 19.♗b5! White can secure a stable advantage: 19...♖g7 20.♗xd7 ♕xd7 21.♘b5 g4 22.♔h1 As we will see in the next game, the attack loses most of its energy once light-squared bishops are off the board. For example, 22...g3 23.♗b6 gxh2 24.♔xh2± with a healthy extra pawn.

17.♘a3

Threatening ♘c4-b6.

17...b5

Covering the key c4-square.

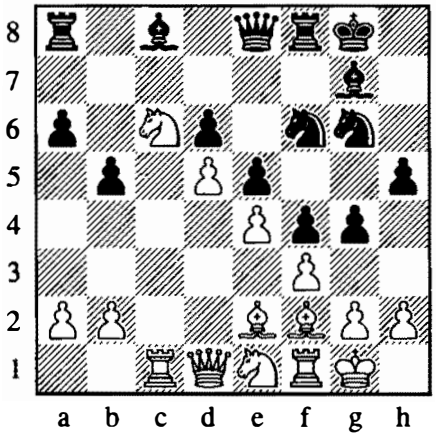
18.♘ac2!

Now that the c4-square is covered, the c6-square is weakened, so the knight heads in this direction.

18...♘f6 19.♘b4 g4 20.♘c6

If 20.♕c2, threatening to trade queens with ♕c7, then 20...g3! 21.hxg3 fxg3 22.♗xg3 h4 23.♗f2 (or 23.♘c6 ♕d7 24.♗f2 ♗h6∓ followed by ...♕g7) 23...♘h5 24.♘ed3 ♕g5∓ with more than enough compensation, in the spirit of the game Taimanov – Najdorf, Zurich 1953, as mentioned earlier.

20...♕e8



We have reached the critical moment in the game, and the utmost precision is required from both sides. I should emphasize that White's five-move knight manoeuvre to c6 is actually far more common than it might seem; the knight is quite strong on c6, and disrupts Black's coordination. On the other hand, White's queenside attack is not as powerful anymore, since the only aggressive plan lies in a2-a4. In contrast, Black is ready to sacrifice a pawn next move with ...g4-g3. Should White worry? We will see in a moment. For now, I would say we have a relatively standard Mar del Plata position, which in this case offers objectively better chances to White, but just one slip is enough for Black to seize the opportunity to execute a near-decisive kingside attack.

21.♔h1?

This is where everything goes wrong for White. Although this is not exactly a mistake, it implies that White will respond to 21...g3 with 22.♗g1, which is just a bad plan as we will see.

The right approach was:

21.a4!

This threatens the queenside before it is too late.

21...g3

Or 21...h4 22.fxg4 ♘xe4 23.♗b6± when Black has fighting chances in an inferior position.

22.♗b6!

Keeping the kingside as closed as possible.

If 22.hxg3 fxg3 23.♗xg3 ♗h6 Black gains the usual compensation for the pawn.

22...bxa4 23.♕xa4 gxh2† 24.♔xh2 h4 25.♕a3!

Attacking the d6-pawn and disrupting Black's piece coordination.

25...♕d7 26.♘a5 ♘e8 27.♖h1

And if:

27...h3?! 28.♔g1±

It seems like Black will experience more kingside problems than White will.

21...g3 22.♗g1?!

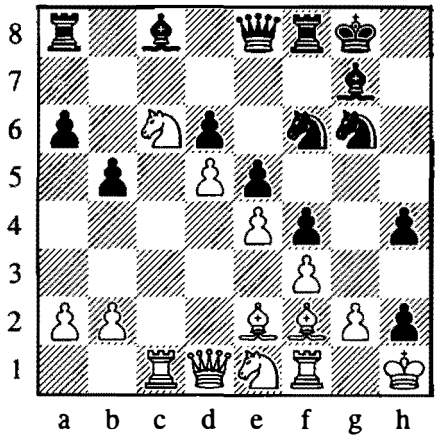
Accepting the sacrifice with 22.hxg3 fxg3 23.♗xg3 would be inconsistent with 21.♔h1, but objectively better as after: 23...h4 24.♗f2 ♘h5 25.f4! The key move. 25...♘hxf4 (or 25...♘gxf4!? 26.♗xh4 ♗f6 with a complex game) 26.♗g4± Black's kingside attack is unlikely to succeed.

22...gxh2 23.♗f2?

White has been heading towards this position for the last three moves, and here we are. Is it a good position for White? Throughout the last decade I have heard innumerable respectable players explain to me, or others, how every time that Black plays the sacrifice ...g4-g3, White should simply react with ♗g1 and after ...gxh2 then ♗f2! would terminate Black's attack, because the h2-pawn would serve as a shield. I presume this piece of wisdom is mostly based on hearsay, so here I would like to put in writing how wrong, or at least misleading, this advice is. Black's attack simply moves on, and as the reader will see, there is no reason to believe White's position is safer because of the h2-pawn.

Better was 23.♗xh2, though after 23...h4 24.a4 ♘h5 25.♔g1 ♘g3 26.♖f2 h3! it is Black who plays for the advantage. For example, 27.axb5 axb5 28.♗xb5 hxg2 29.♘xg2 ♗h3 when Black's kingside attack is far more promising than White's extra pawn.

23...h4!∓



Preparing ...♘h5-g3. Maybe this is too early, but I would dare to say that White's position is near desperate already, as Black has taken the initiative and White no longer finds the time to carry out any aggressive queenside plans. In fact, after several hours of analysis, I could not find any decent continuation for White. For now I just call this position "slight advantage for Black" though I do not think White can prevent the position from becoming "big advantage for Black"!

24.♘d3

The attempt 24.a4 bxa4 25.♕xa4 is too slow, and can be met by 25...♘h5!? 26.♔xh2 ♘g3∓ with a huge advantage due to the potential threat ...h4-h3.

24...♘h5 25.♔xh2

Thus White is forced to capture his "shield" h2-pawn after all. It becomes clear that White's manoeuvre ♗g1-f2 was a mere waste of moves.

It is too late to start with 25.a4 ♘g3† 26.♔xh2 (or 26.♗xg3 fxg3–+ followed by ...h4-h3) 26...h3! (or 26...bxa4!?) 27.♖g1 ♘h4∓ and Black's attack is very powerful.

25...♘g3 26.♖g1 ♖f7

Preparing to transfer to the h-file.

A tempting alternative is 26...♕d7!? threatening ...h4-h3xg2 followed by ...♕h3, though after 27.♗e1! h3 28.♗xg3 fxg3† 29.♔xg3 ♗h6∓ White's king seems to be safer than in the game.

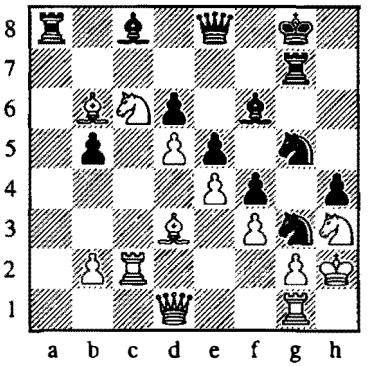
27.♗b6

If 27.♗e1 ♗f6 28.♘f2 White gets an unpleasant position that is similar to the game after: 28...h3! 29.gxh3 ♖h7∓ When a possible continuation is 30.♕d3 ♕f8 31.♗f1 ♕h6 32.♘g4 ♗xg4 33.fxg4 ♗h4 when the threat of ...♘xf1 and ...♗g3 wins in basically every variation, such as: 34.♖c3 ♖f8 35.♕f3 ♘xf1† 36.♖xf1 ♗g3†!–+

27...♗f6 28.♘f2 h3!∓

A great sacrifice. By giving up this pawn Black obtains an open g-file and a semi-open h-file to bring White's king under fire. There are so many threats that White cannot take advantage of his extra pawn, let alone be able to make further progress on the queenside.

Note that 28...♖h7!? also gives excellent attacking chances to Black. A long but very instructive variation is: 29.♘h3 (it is necessary to block ...h4-h3) 29...♘f8 30.a4 Searching for counterplay, but Black just keeps on going: 30...♖g7 31.axb5 axb5 32.♗d3 (or 32.♗xb5 ♗xh3 33.gxh3 ♖b7 winning a piece) 32...♘h7 33.♖c2 ♘g5!–+



Lifting the h3 blockade. White can only wait and see how Black breaks through the defence with a well-prepared ...h4-h3: 34.♘xg5 ♖xg5 35.♗f1 ♕h5 36.♕e1 ♔g7 37.♖f2 h3 38.gxh3 ♗xh3! With forced mate.

29.gxh3 ♖b7 30.♗a5 ♖h7 31.♗f1 ♗h4

Bringing the bishop into the attack; a threat is ...♘xf1 and ...♗g3, nearly winning.

Another strong plan is 31...♘h8!? to follow with ...♘f7-g5 attacking the h3-pawn, and now after 32.♘h1 ♕d7! 33.♘f2 (33.♘xg3? ♖xh3†!–+) 33...♕g7 34.♘h1 ♗h4∓ White is in big trouble.

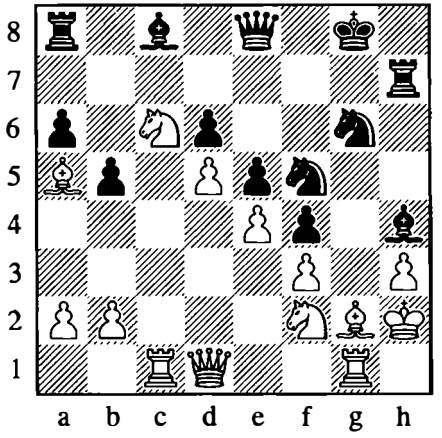
32.♗g2

This move accelerates the loss, though I believe there was no way to survive against precise play from Black.

More stubborn was 32.♗d3 ♗g5 33.♗f1 ♕f8 34.♖c2 ♕h6∓ though the attack is easy to carry out and White's position seems rather desperate.

32...♘f5!–+

This rather surprising blow decides the game very nicely and quickly. White's king is so vulnerable that even an extra piece will not help him survive.



33.exf5

Declining the piece sacrifice with 33.♗b6 does not help as after 33...♗g3† 34.♔h1 ♘e3 35.♗xe3 fxe3 White is just lost. For example, 36.♘g4 ♗xg4 37.fxg4 ♗f2 38.♖f1 ♕f8 when there is no defence against the threat of ...♕f4-g3 and ...♖xh3 since 39.♕f3? loses to: 39...♕xf3 40.♗xf3 ♖xh3† 41.♔g2 ♘f4#

Neither does 33.♘g4 help: 33...♗g3† 34.♔h1 ♘e3 35.♕e2 ♗xg4 36.fxg4 ♕d7 With decisive threats such as ...♘xg4 or ...♔g7 followed by ...♖ah8xh3.

33...♗xf2 34.fxg6

Or 34.♖f1 ♗g3† 35.♔g1 ♘h4 and wins.

34...♕xg6

There is nothing to do against the checkmating threat ...♕g3 and ...♗xh3; note the minor role White's knight has played in the fight.

35.♕f1

Even easier is: 35.♖f1 ♕g3† 36.♔h1 ♖xh3† 37.♗xh3 ♕xh3#

35...♕g3† 36.♔h1 ♔f8

The most precise, getting out of the g-file pin.

37.♘xe5 ♗xh3 38.♘g6† ♔e8

White resigns as mate is unavoidable.

0–1

Final remarks

1. The biggest fact to remember from this game is the ineffectiveness of White's moves 21-23 – that is, the plan of ♔h1 and then ♗f2-g1-f2. Although this is a typical response to Black's ...g6-g5-g4-g3 plan, it does not work as well as many believe.
2. Black's 23...h4! played a key role in this win, as it is the best way to open lines on the kingside in order to checkmate White's king. The plan ...♘h5-g3 followed by ...h4-h3 is very strong and practically irresistible.

Sergei Azarov – Karsten Volke

Dresden 2007

Learning objective: This game illustrates how difficult it is for Black to create serious kingside threats without his light-squared bishop.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 d6 5.0–0 ♗d7 6.♖e1 g6 7.d4

There is a nice concept behind this theoretical move. White will follow with d4-d5 obtaining the structure studied in this chapter under favourable circumstances. The reason is that White will be able to trade his bad bishop for Black's good bishop. As we will see in this game, this trade greatly reduces Black's chances for a mating attack.

7...♗g7 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♗xd7† ♘xd7 10.♗e3 0–0

Another option was 10...h6 (preparing ...f7-f5) 11.♘fd2 f5 12.f3 and now 12...♗f6 13.♗f2 h5 gave Black perfectly reasonable counterplay in the game Felgaer – Sokolov, Istanbul (ol) 2012 (or 13...♗g5!?).

11.c4

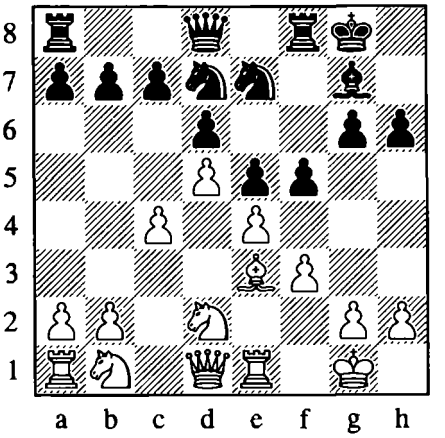
Of course not 11.♘fd2? f5 12.f3 f4 13.♗f2 g5 14.c4 h5 when Black has an extra tempo compared to the game.

11...h6

Covering the g5-square, preparing ...f7-f5.

The immediate 11...f5?! does not work as well due to 12.♘g5 threatening ♘e6, and after 12...f4 13.♗c1 (but not 13.♘e6? fxe3!) 13...♘c5 14.b4 ♗f6 15.♘xh7 ♔xh7 16.bxc5 dxc5 17.♘d2± White is much better after ♘f3 and ♗b2, pressuring the e5-pawn.

12.♘fd2 f5 13.f3±



White has achieved his ideal piece formation with ♗e3, ♘d2 and a knight coming to c3, and he stands a little better.

13...f4 14.♗f2 g5 15.♘c3

The premature 15.b4? is met by 15...a5! forcing White to spoil his structure, since the usual 16.a3? loses a pawn to 16...axb4 due to the a-file pin.

15...♘g6

Another option was 15...a5 16.a3 ♘g6 17.b4 b6 and now White needs a quick method for opening up the queenside before Black gains kingside counterplay. A possible continuation is 18.♘a4!? axb4 19.axb4 h5 20.c5 bxc5 21.bxc5 ♕e7 22.cxd6 cxd6 23.♘c4± when the open queenside and the weak d6-pawn prevent Black from advancing on the kingside.

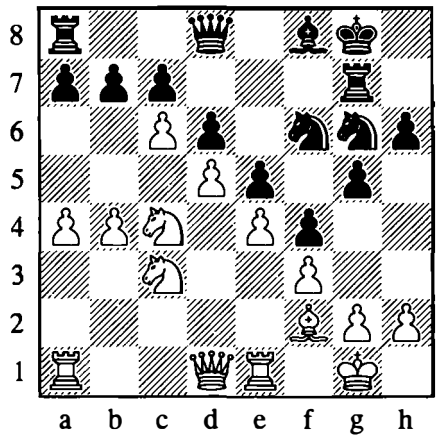
16.b4 ♘f6 17.c5 ♖f7 18.♘c4

Less precise is 18.♖c1 since it is not clear yet where the rook will be most helpful: 18...♗f8 19.♔h1 ♖g7 20.♘c4 h5 And now the game Brkic – Danielsen, Heraklio 2007, went 21.cxd6 (if instead White played 21.c6 now, 21...b6 would require White to play a2-a4-a5 and move his rook back to a1) 21...cxd6 22.♘b5 a6 23.♘ba3 g4 Black has perfectly good play.

18...♗f8 19.a4 ♖g7

Black is following the schematic piece arrangement previously discussed, but the lack of his bishop on c8 makes it harder to execute ...g5-g4.

20.c6



If White can establish a solid pawn on c6, he will be positionally winning on the queenside. Here Black is in trouble as he is losing the queenside battle before he has created any kingside threats.

20...b6?

Worsening Black's problems by allowing White to open the queenside.

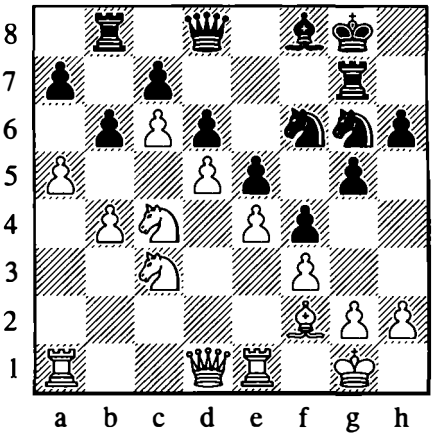
The anti-positional-looking 20...bxc6 21.dxc6 was necessary, as it prevents White's rook from coming into the game. Then 21...♕c8!? 22.♘d5 ♘xd5 23.♕xd5† ♔h8 24.♕d1 ♕e6 25.♖c1± gives a substantial positional advantage for White, but Black can still hope to become active on the kingside with ...h6-h5 and ...g5-g4.

21.a5!

After this move White is essentially winning. The c6-pawn combined with an invasion down the a-file will create decisive threats.

21...♖b8

The alternative 21...h5 22.♘b5 g4 loses to 23.♘xc7! ♖xc7 24.axb6 axb6 25.♗xb6.



22.axb6 axb6 23.♘b5 ♕c8

Supporting ...g5-g4, and hoping to transfer the queen to h3 after ...g5-g4xf3. Black would not need to waste time with this if he still had his bishop on c8.

23...h5 is no better: 24.♖a7 g4 25.♔h1 Black's attack gets nowhere after: 25...g3 26.hxg3 fxg3 27.♗xg3 h4 28.♗h2 ♘h5 29.♘e3 ♘g3† 30.♔g1 ♘f4 31.♘g4+– When nothing can remove this blocking knight, and once again Black's need for a light-squared bishop is evident.

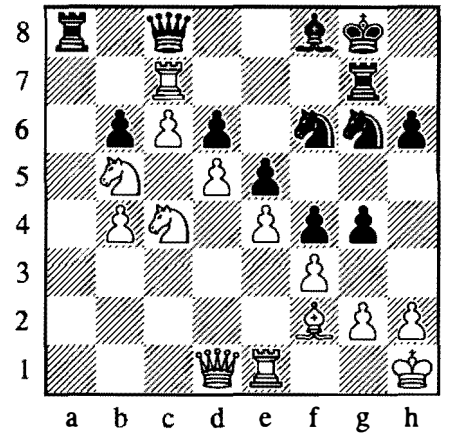
24.♖a7 g4 25.♔h1 ♖a8

Making things a little easier for White.

Black's threats are easily blocked after: 25...g3 26.hxg3 fxg3 27.♗xg3 ♘h5 28.♗h2 ♕d8 (or 28...♘gf4 29.g4+–) 29.♘e3 ♕h4 30.♘f5+–

If 25...h5 then 26.♗xb6! breaks through Black's defence. 26...cxb6 (or 26...♘e8 27.♗xc7! ♖xb5 28.♘b6+–) 27.♘cxd6 ♗xd6 28.♘xd6 ♕d8 29.♖xg7† ♔xg7 30.♘f5† ♔f8 31.d6 And the pawns decide the game.

26.♖xc7!+–



Black's position is bad enough to resign already, as his attack is getting nowhere while White will have two extra passed pawns.

26...♖xc7 27.♘xb6 ♕b8 28.♘xa8 ♖g7 29.♘b6 g3 30.♗g1 gxh2 31.♗f2 ♘h5 32.c7 ♖xc7 33.♘xc7 ♕xc7 34.♕c1 ♕a7 35.♕c2 ♘g3† 36.♔xh2 ♕e7

Threatening ♕h4-h1#.

37.♕c8

White could still spoil the game with 37.♗xg3?? fxg3† 38.♔g1 (38.♔xg3 ♕h4#) 38...♕h4 39.♔f1 ♘f4 with forced mate.

But after the text move, Black resigned.

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's need for a light-squared bishop was particularly evident on moves 17-23, as the desired ...g5-g4 break could not be carried out without extra help.
2. White's c6-pawn was the basis for his victory. Once the a-file became open, Black became defenceless against the potential piece sacrifices to turn the c6-pawn into a winning passed pawn.

Loek van Wely – Sergey Krylov

Mallorca 2004

Learning objective: This game is an example of how White may block the kingside with g2-g4, and then have a free hand to advance with his queenside plans.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.b4 ♘h5 10.♖e1 ♔h8

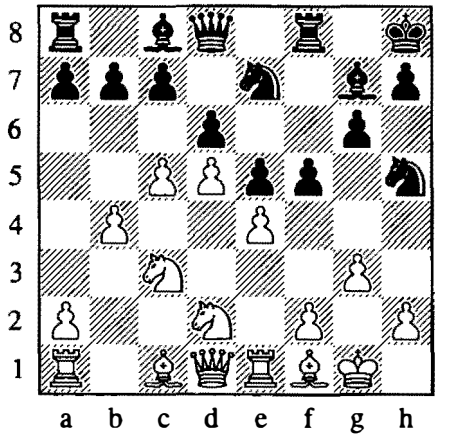
This move has fallen out of fashion in the last three years, possibly due to Black's poor scores.

Much more common is 10...f5 11.♘g5 ♘f6 12.♗f3 c6 13.♗e3 h6 14.♘e6 ♗xe6 15.dxe6 with a complex and highly analyzed position.

11.♘d2 ♘f4 12.♗f1 f5 13.g3

Another option is 13.a4!? a5 14.bxa5 ♖xa5 15.♘b3 ♖a8 16.a5 fxe4 17.♘xe4 as in Sokolov – Arakhamia-Grant, Gibraltar 2009.

13...♘h5 14.c5



14...f4?

A general piece of advice for King's Indian players is to decide beforehand whether an opposite-flanks race is likely to work or not. If Black is likely to lose the race, then he should not start it at all, and instead should attempt to find counter-chances by keeping the central tension.

In this case, the way White's kingside structure is set up should be a red flag for Black. In previous examples Black's attack has proven effective due to the advance ...g6-g5-g4-g3, but what is Black supposed to do in this case? Any feasible attack will take much longer, while White's forces are already arriving at the queenside.

Much more principled is 14...♘f6 (preparing ...fxe4) and now 15.cxd6!? cxd6 16.b5 fxe4 17.♘dxe4 yields a level position, while 15.♗g2 can be answered by the unorthodox 15...dxc5!? 16.bxc5 fxe4 17.♘dxe4 ♘fxd5 with level chances.

15.♘c4 ♘g8

Not: 15...g5?? 16.♕xh5+–

A reasonable try was 15...♘f6 16.a4 g5 though after 17.♖a2 ♘g6 18.♖c2 g4 19.♗a3± it seems Black will be unable to pose a real threat to White's kingside.

16.a4

This is a fine multi-purpose move: it expands on the queenside and clears a2 for the rook to defend the second rank.

16...♘gf6 17.♖a2 ♘e8

Black's last two moves prepared 17...g5? but unfortunately White is winning after 18.cxd6 cxd6 19.♘b5 since the d6-pawn cannot be protected.

18.♖c2

Another option was 18.g4!? ♘hf6 19.f3, which is similar to the game.

18...♗d7 19.g4!±

A good decision; Black's attack was not really threatening, but it is better to simply close the kingside immediately, in order to have a free hand on the queenside.

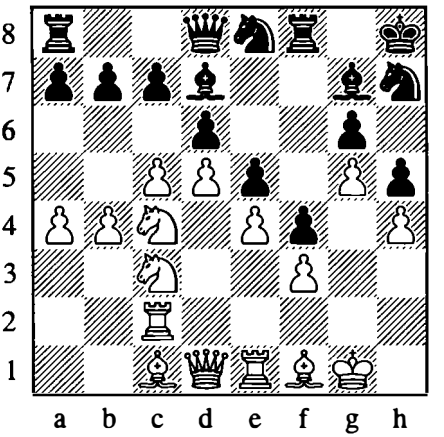
19...♘hf6 20.f3 h5?

A healthier alternative was 20...g5 21.b5 h5 but after 22.h3± Black does not seem to be getting anywhere, while White's queenside expansion keeps on rolling.

21.g5!

Closing the kingside decisively.

21...♘h7 22.h4+–



Black's only hope to create counterplay on the kingside is to sacrifice a piece with ...♘xg5, but this is very unlikely to work, as White may easily blockade the kingside pawns, or simply continue pursuing his already-advanced queenside plan. White, on the other hand, has a very significant spatial advantage over the entire board, and the remainder of this game is an illustration of how he may exploit his enormous positional advantage.

22...♖f7 23.♘a5 ♗c8

23...b6, attempting to open up some lines, doesn't help due to 24.cxb6 cxb6 25.♘c6 ♕c8 26.b5!?+– followed by ♖a2 and a4-a5.

24.c6!

Gaining even more space. As before, the c6-pawn secures White a winning queenside advantage. Since in this game Black cannot find counterplay on the kingside, the rest of the game is rather easily decided.

24...b6

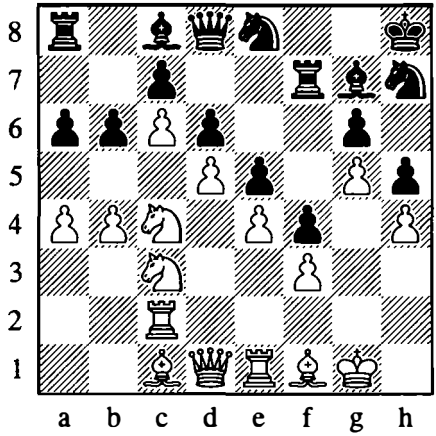
Accepting a lost position.

But 24...bxc6? loses after 25.♘xc6 ♕d7 26.♖h2! followed by ♗h3 trapping the queen.

25.♘c4

The threat is a4-a5 opening up the a-file immediately, thus it is necessary to play:

25...a6



A new phase in the game has begun. Black's pieces are so constrained they cannot play, hence Black will spend the next twenty moves simply waiting for the end. Meanwhile, White has complete freedom to manoeuvre in order to find the right winning method. Note how Black is ready to close the queenside. If White plays a4-a5, then Black replies ...b6-b5, and if White plays b4-b5, then Black replies ...a6-a5. Therefore, when White decides to push one of his queenside pawns, he will need to think how exactly he desires to sacrifice a piece in order to break Black's last line of defence.

26.♖h2

This prophylactic move is intended to keep an eye on the kingside in case Black attempts the shake things up with ...♘xg5.

If 26.a5 b5 the position is momentarily closed.

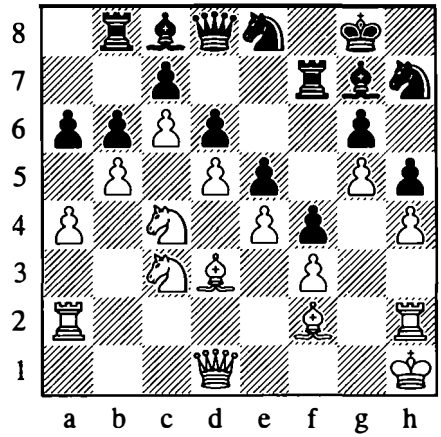
26...♔g8 27.♖ee2

The manoeuvring begins.

27...♘f8 28.♗d2 ♘h7 29.♗e1 ♘f8 30.♖a2 ♘h7 31.♔h1 ♘f8 32.♗f2

Note how all of White's pieces are aiming toward the queenside.

32...♖b8 33.♗d3 ♘h7 34.b5



The positional threat is a4-a5 opening up two decisive lines on the queenside, and there is nothing better than:

34...a5

The game is entirely closed, and now White will prepare the decisive break.

Even worse is 34...axb5? 35.axb5 as White wins on the spot after 35...♗f8 36.♕a4 ♗g7 37.♕a7.

If 34...♖a8 then 35.a5! opens up the queenside decisively: 35...axb5 36.♘xb5 bxa5 37.♗e1 ♗f8 38.♘xa5+– The c6-pawn prevents Black's manoeuvres, making White's queenside invasion easy.

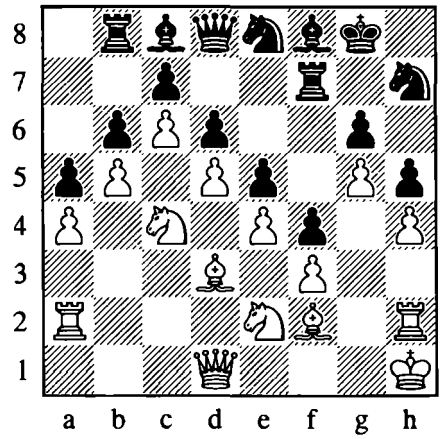
35.♘e2

The beginning of a lengthy yet winning manoeuvre: ♘c3-e2-c1-b3xa5.

35...♗f8

Attempting to create counterplay with 35...♘xg5!? is refuted by: 36.hxg5 ♕xg5 37.♕g1! ♕h6 Black hopes to push ...g6-g5, but now

38.♗xb6! cxb6 39.♘xb6 decides the game due to the creation of two powerful passed pawns.



36.♘c1 ♗g7

Again 36...♘xg5 is met by 37.hxg5 ♕xg5 38.♕g1!?+– (or 38.♗h4 ♕h6 39.♕g1+–).

37.♘b3 ♗f8 38.♗f1

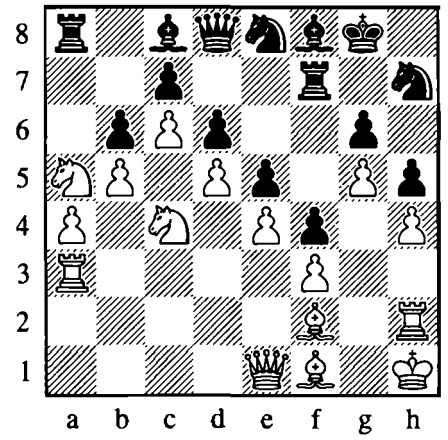
There is no hurry.

38...♗e7 39.♕e1 ♖a8

Now 39...♘xg5!? can be met by 40.hxg5 ♗xg5 41.♗g1!? followed by ♖ag2 and wins.

40.♖a3 ♗f8 41.♘bxa5!

White gives up a piece to open up the game; the a- and b-pawns are unstoppable.



41...bxa5 42.♘xa5 ♘g7 43.♘c4 ♘xg5

A desperate attempt for counterplay.

Of course waiting will not help: 43...♖b8 44.♖b3 ♘e8 45.a5 ♘g7 46.b6 ♗a6 47.b7 Followed by ♘d2 and pushing the a-pawn.

44.hxg5 ♕xg5 45.a5 ♕d8 46.b6 cxb6 47.axb6

White has two passed pawns on the sixth rank; the rest is simple.

47...♖xa3 48.♘xa3 g5 49.♕b4 g4 50.♗h4 ♗e7 51.b7 ♗xh4 52.b8=♕
1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's biggest mistake was attempting a kingside attack with 14...f4. Instead, Black should have transformed the structure into a King's Indian Type III-B with 14...♘f6 and 15...fxe4 obtaining a playable position by analogy with the previous games.
2. Unlike previous examples, White's kingside pawns on f2-g3-h2 are hard to attack, as there is no clear target. This fact made Black's attack ineffective, besides which Black was already far behind when this race began.
3. The reason White was winning after 22.h4 was that he had an enormous space advantage all over the board. As we will see in the next example, closing the kingside by itself does not guarantee an advantage if Black can secure some space on the queenside.

Throughout this book I have been hesitant to include rapid games (let alone blindfold chess), as I prefer games played at the highest level. In this case, I thought it was worthwhile making an exception, as in the next game Carlsen's execution is simply superb and an ideal example for the position.

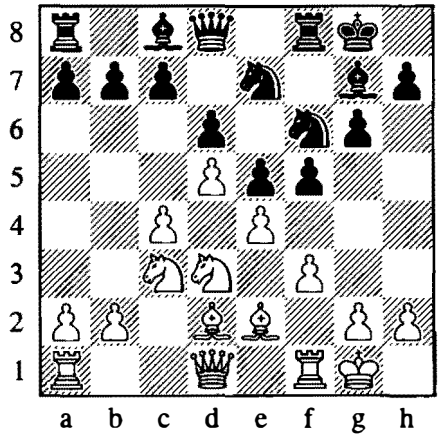
Levon Aronian – Magnus Carlsen

Nice (blindfold) 2010

Learning objectives:

1. This game illustrates how Black may react against White's g2-g4 plan.
2. Please pay close attention to how Black creates tension throughout the entire board before making any captures.
3. Notice how Black does not miss a chance to expand on the queenside once White attempts to close the kingside.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.d4 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘e1 ♘d7 10.♘d3 f5 11.♗d2 ♘f6 12.f3



12...♔h8!?

An interesting alternative, keeping the central tension.

More common is 12...f4 going into the typical race of flank offensives, as we studied earlier in the chapter.

13.g4!?

Deviating from the theory books, although this idea is rather thematic.

Theory suggests 13.♖c1 c6 (or 13...c5!?) 14.♗e3 a6 with a complex position.

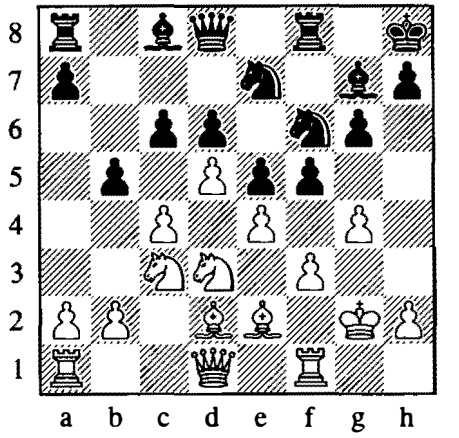
13...c6

A healthy decision. Since 13.g4 intends to prevent Black's kingside attack, it is necessary to create central tension in order to dispute White's central hegemony.

If 13...f4?! 14.♖c1 g5 15.♗e1 h5 16.h3± White should hold the kingside comfortably while making progress with c4-c5.

14.♔g2 b5!

This is very nice and logical – it undermines the support of the d5-pawn, and creates a route into the game for Black's light-squared bishop, via b7.



15.b3

15.dxc6?! does not work due to: 15...bxc4 16.♘b4 ♖b8∓

Neither does 15.cxb5? cxd5∓ when Black fully controls the centre.

A reasonable alternative was 15.g5 ♘h5 16.cxb5 cxd5 17.exd5 but Black has many ways to create counterplay. For example: 17...f4 (or 17...a5!? covering the b4-square, preparing to attack the d5-pawn with ...♗b7) 18.♔h1 ♕d7 19.♘f2 ♗b7 With an unclear position.

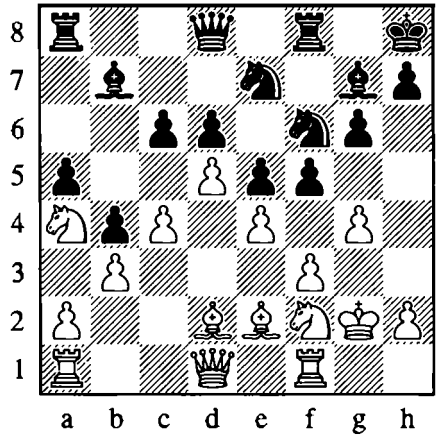
15...a5 16.♘f2

The alternative 16.dxc6?! bxc4 17.bxc4 ♘xc6 is not attractive to White, as his centre is destroyed while his kingside remains vulnerable.

16...b4 17.♘a4

White's knight has been forced onto this rather useless square, and the reader should notice a crucial fact: White played g2-g4 in order to prevent Black's attack and to have a free hand on the queenside. However, after the last couple of moves White has nowhere to expand on the queenside anyway.

17...♗b7



18.♖c1?

A careless move; White simply does not see the danger in his position.

Safer was 18.♔g1 moving away from the deadly a8-h1 diagonal, and now Black has a wide choice of options. I would recommend increasing the tension with 18...h5!? and if White closes the position with 19.g5 ♘d7 20.h4 ♖f7!? then Black has nothing to fear. Unlike Van Wely's game, Black has managed to claim a significant amount of queenside space, and his chances are no worse. A possible continuation is 21.a3 c5 22.♕c2 ♕c7 23.axb4 axb4 24.♘d3 ♖af8 25.♗e3 ♗c8 with a complex position.

18...fxe4 19.fxe4 cxd5 20.exd5 ♘exd5!

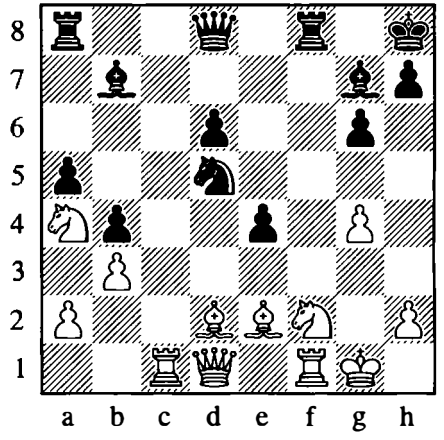
Breaking up the centre at the cost of a piece. I am not sure whether Carlsen calculated everything up to the end, or if he simply knew this sacrifice makes sense, since White's king is so terribly exposed, and White's forces are not well coordinated to make use of the extra piece.

21.cxd5 ♘xd5 22.♔g1

22.♗f3? loses the queen after 22...♖xf3! and now 23.♕xf3 ♘f4† or 23.♔xf3 ♘c3†.

22...e4!∓

This powerful move is probably what Aronian missed four moves ago. The threats of 23...e3 or 23...♗d4 are decisive.



23.♘xe4 ♗d4† 24.♖f2

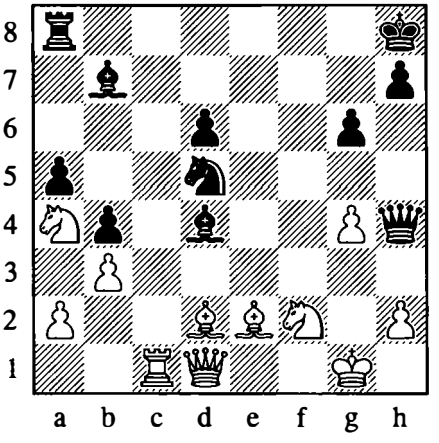
24.♔g2 is no improvement: 24...♕e7 25.♗f3 (or 25.♗d3 ♘e3† 26.♗xe3 ♗xe4†–+) 25...♖xf3! 26.♕xf3 ♘f6 27.♖ce1 ♗xe4 28.♖xe4 ♘xe4∓ With a healthy extra pawn.

24...♖xf2 25.♘xf2?

The last mistake in a very difficult position.

The best defence was: 25.♗g5! ♗f6 (or the complex 25...♗e3!?) 26.♗xf6† ♖xf6 27.♕d4 ♘f4! 28.♗f1 (but not 28.♕xf6†? ♕xf6 29.♘xf6 ♘xe2† 30.♔f2 ♘xc1–+ nor 28.♘xf6?? ♘xe2†–+) 28...♗xe4 29.g5! A miracle save, but after 29...♘e6 30.♕xf6† ♕xf6 31.gxf6 ♖f8∓ White is nearly lost anyway.

25...♕h4–+



White is defenceless against the attack.

26.♕e1

Also deadly is 26.♗e1 ♗e5 threatening ...♕xh2†.

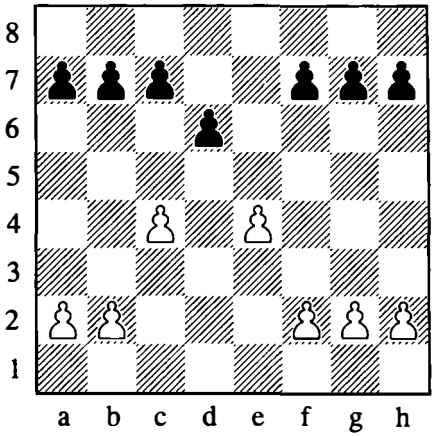
26...♖f8 27.♗f3 ♖xf3 28.♕e4 ♕xf2†
0–1

Final remarks

1. Unlike the previous game, White played g2-g4 before Black had played ...f5-f4, which gave Black the opportunity to keep the pawn on f5, generating tension.
2. Black's key moves were 12...c6 and 13...b5! creating central tension, bringing the bishop into the game via b7, and securing queenside space to avoid being asphyxiated as in the previous example.
3. Black essentially played this game to perfection, and even if White had anticipated the strong piece sacrifice, Black would have had an excellent fighting position without any of the positional problems studied in the previous example.

Chapter 17

Open KID



This structure most typically comes from the King's Indian Defence when Black captures with ...e5xd4, though the same structure can be obtained in some lines of the Bogo-Indian, or the Philidor Defence as soon as White manages to play c2-c4 to increase his spatial advantage. In most of these positions Black will include the moves ...g7-g6 to fianchetto the bishop, and ...c7-c6 to prevent White from placing a knight on d5.

White often enjoys a small advantage in this structure because of his space and because the d6-pawn can be a serious target either in the middlegame or in an eventual endgame. The opening and post-opening phase are crucial, as these moves often determine whether Black will obtain counterplay or not. If White manages to arrange his pieces ideally without first falling into some tactical problems, then he is likely to have a lasting advantage, forcing Black into a dull defensive task. So why do Black players accept this structure? There are two reasons:

1. If one wishes to play the King's Indian Defence, it is unavoidable to play this structure once in a while.
2. These positions can lead to sharp tactical complications which give Black realistic chances to play for the full point. High tactical precision is often required from both sides.

White's plans

1. Pressure along the d-file, attacking the vulnerable d6-pawn.
2. Expand on the kingside with f2-f4, and possibly g2-g4.
3. When the right time comes, break on the kingside with either e4-e5 or f4-f5.
4. Avoid an excessive trade of pieces in order to make use of the spatial advantage.
5. If this is possible, expand on the queenside as well with a2-a3 and b2-b4.

Black's plans

1. Trade pieces to decrease the space problem. Trading a couple of minor pieces is often good enough.
2. Place knights on e5 and c5 and then play ...♕b6-b4 attacking the c4-pawn. If White replies b2-b3, then ...a7-a5-a4xb3 followed by ...♖a3 is a good plan. The drawback of this plan is that Black's queen can be targeted.
3. Break in the centre with ...d6-d5 to unleash his pieces.
4. Dispute White's control of the centre with the break ...f7-f5, trading the f-pawn for White's e4-pawn.
5. Attack White's c4-pawn with ...a7-a6, ...c7-c6 and ...b7-b5, to reduce White's control of the centre.

6. Create a kingside attack; place a knight on f4, and possibly play ...g6-g5, to control the f4-square, and to prevent White from expanding with f3-f4.

For White the most important task is to keep his pieces well coordinated while refraining from trading pieces if possible. If this is achieved, then the d6-pawn will remain vulnerable while the kingside expansion will be easily achievable. For Black the most important task is to remain active and to be able to continuously create threats, or trade pieces, before White gains a stable advantage. Black's Plan 3, the ...d6-d5 break, is ideal but very hard to accomplish in practice. Black's remaining plans are all equally important and choosing among them requires good calculating ability more than anything else.

As a King's Indian player I was often reluctant to play the plan with ...g6-g5 (Plan 6), because it seems to be a positional aberration. But it turns out that this plan can actually be very effective if applied correctly, and we will see some examples in this chapter.

The first game in this chapter is an example of White's ideal piece arrangement and the subsequent kingside expansion. The second example illustrates how Black's Plan 2 can backfire and his queen can become trapped. The third example briefly discusses Black's ...f7-f5 break, and then we move on to Black's ...g6-g5 plans with three examples.

It might seem paradoxical that I say this structure is superior for White and then I include only two examples in which White wins. The reason for this decision was that the first example in this chapter is good enough to describe most of White's victories. In fact, White wins the first game in such a convincing manner that I spend the rest of the chapter providing ideas for Black players to fight against White's seemingly superior strategy.

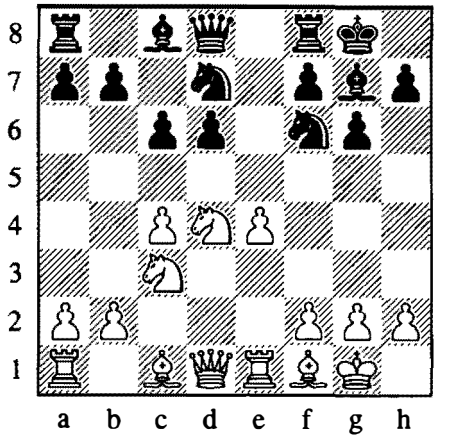
Georg Meier – Sebastien Feller

Lubbock 2011

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of how White may pressure the d6-pawn to force Black's army into submission.
2. Please note White's ideal piece coordination.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.d4 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.♖e1 c6 9.♗f1 exd4 10.♘xd4



We reach the structure of interest. As mentioned earlier, this structure is often just inferior for Black. To provide some evidence, note that in this position White scores above 65% on GM-level games, which is well above the usual 53-54% White should obtain on average.

10...♖e8

An alternative was 10...♘g4!? 11.♕xg4 ♗xd4 12.♕d1 ♕f6 13.♗e3 ♗xe3 14.♖xe3± though White is more comfortable as the d6-pawn is vulnerable.

11.♗f4 ♘c5 12.♕c2 ♘g4

So far both players are following one of the main lines in this variation, and now Meier goes into a good but less popular sideline with:

13.♕d2

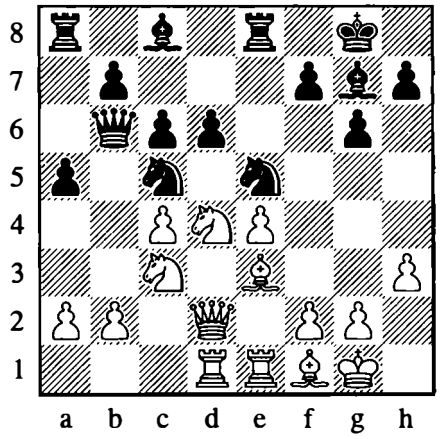
More common is 13.♖ad1!? though after 13...♕f6 14.♗g3 h5 Black seems to have reasonable counterplay.

13...♘e5

In the past, Black had managed to make a draw with 13...♗e5 14.h3 ♗xf4 15.♕xf4 ♘e5 16.♖ad1 ♕b6, as in the game Zueger – Jacimovic, Pula 1997, but after 17.♕g3!?± followed by f2-f4, there is no reason for Black to be optimistic, since 17...♕xb2? is met by 18.f4 ♘ed7 19.♘f5± followed by ♘xd6 with a dominant position.

A more reasonable alternative was 13...a5 14.♖ad1 a4 15.h3 ♘e5 16.♗e3 ♕a5 as in Zueger – Vogt, Switzerland 1997, but after 17.f4 ♘ed7 18.♕c2 ♘f6 19.♗f2 a3 (or 19...♘h5 20.g3) 20.b3 ♘h5 21.g3± Black's counterplay seems to runs out of fuel and we are left with a position similar to the game.

14.♖ad1 ♕b6 15.h3 a5 16.♗e3



Preparing f2-f4 gaining some space.

16...♘ed7

The knight must return sooner or later.

The alternative 16...♕b4 is met by 17.♕c1! when the c4-pawn is immune. For example, 17...♘xc4? 18.a3 ♕xb2 19.♗xc4± or 17...a4? 18.♘c2 ♕a5 19.♖xd6±. So necessary is 17...♕b6 18.f4 ♘ed7 19.♘f3± which is similar to the game.

17.♕c2 a4 18.f4 ♕b4

Or 18...♘f6 19.♗f2 ♕c7 20.g4!?± when White's kingside expansion is threatening, while Black lacks targets.

19.♗f2 ♘b6 20.a3 ♕a5

White has been forced to weaken his b3-square, but this is not a problem at all, as he is ready to take concrete action on the kingside with:

21.g4

Black's pieces have abandoned the kingside, and this attack is logical and strong.

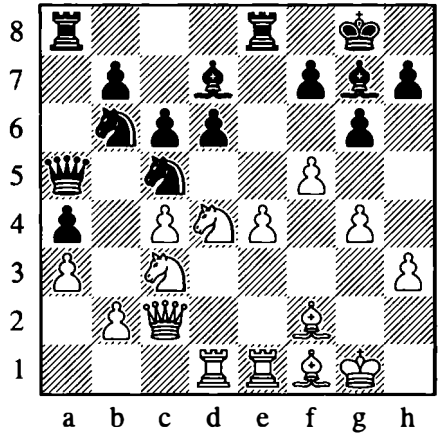
21...♗d7?!

Black finally connects his rooks, but this move cuts the only path for Black's knights to return in defence of the king, thus making White's attack even more powerful.

A better defence was: 21...♘bd7 22.♘f3 (now the attack with 22.f5?! will not work well due to 22...♘e5! since a knight on e5 can comfortably protect the kingside) 22...♕c7 23.♗d4 ♗xd4† 24.♘xd4± White has a preferable position because of the space advantage and the weakened dark squares around Black's king.

22.f5!±

The logical continuation. Black's position is already close to lost. White's attacking task is very simple and Black does not have a satisfactory defence.



22...♖ad8

The best defence was 22...♗c8! allowing a black knight to come back: 23.♘f3 ♘bd7 24.♖xd6± But White is simply a pawn up.

23.♗h4 ♖c8 24.♗f2 ♖cd8 25.♗h4

Of course White is not aiming for a repetition; he just needs time to decide the best way to impose his advantage.

25...♖c8 26.♘f3

A good piece rearrangement. This move exerts pressure on the d6-pawn, and prepares the knight for a kingside invasion with ♘g5.

26...♘b3

Indirectly protecting the d6-pawn.

If 26...♗f8 27.♗g3, attacking the d6-pawn, and after 27...♘b3 28.e5 Black is simply lost (but not 28.♗xd6?? ♗xd6 29.♖xd6 ♕c5† winning the rook). 28...d5 29.e6! fxe6 30.fxg6+–

27.♕f2!

A strong move, threatening ♖xd6 as well as ♘g5 and fxg6, invading down the f-file.

Again not 27.♖xd6?? ♕c5† winning the rook.

27...♗f8

Protecting the d6-pawn, and preparing 28...♕c5.

Trading queens with 27...♕c5 fails due to: 28.♕xc5 dxc5 (or 28...♘xc5 29.♖xd6±) 29.f6 ♗f8 30.♘xa4!+–

28.♔h1

Getting out of the a7-g1 diagonal, threatening ♘g5 and fxg6 with a crushing kingside attack.

Less precise is 28.♘g5?! due to 28...♕c5! offering to trade queens. White retains strong attacking chances, but things can get more complicated. For example, after 29.♖e3 when in the event of 29...gxf5 30.gxf5 ♗xf5!? a very sharp position arises.

28...♕c5

There is nothing better.

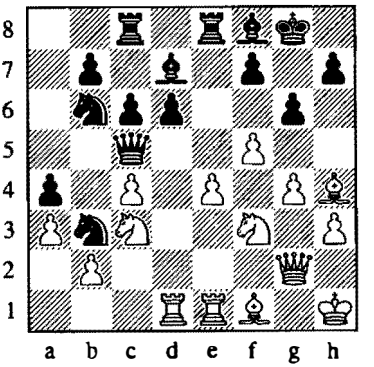
The break 28...d5 is simply met by: 29.cxd5 ♗c5 30.♕h2 cxd5 31.exd5+–

If 28...♘c5 29.♘g5! and the attack is simply winning, for example: 29...f6 30.fxg6 hxg6 (30...fxg5? 31.♕f7† ♔h8 32.♕xh7#) 31.♕xf6 or 29...♗g7 30.♖xd6.

29.e5?

A severe miscalculation; I presume both sides were in time pressure by this point.

Instead, the simple 29.♕g2! keeps all options open.



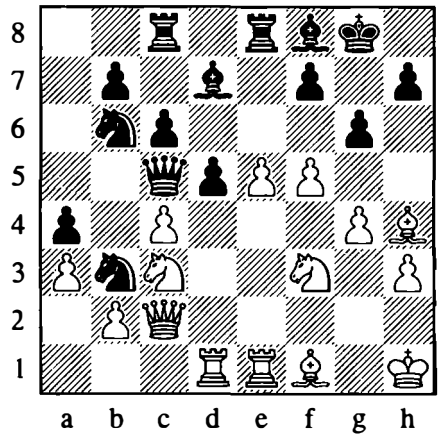
There is no defence against White's multiple threats, for example 29...♕a5 (or 29...♗g7 30.e5 threatening ♘e4: 30...d5 31.e6! fxe6 32.f6 ♗f8 33.♘e5+–) 30.♗g3 Winning the d6-pawn and the game.

29...d5?

And Black returns the favour.

Instead 29...♕xf2 would have allowed Black to stay in the game after 30.♗xf2 c5 31.♘e4 ♗c6! 32.♘f6† ♔h8.

30.♕c2!+–



Black is unable to respond to the decisive threats of 31.♗f2 and 31.e6.

30...♘xc4

If 30...♕a5 then 31.e6! decides the game after 31...fxe6 32.fxg6 h6 (32...hxg6? 33.♕xg6† ♗g7 34.♗f6+–) 33.♘e5 with a crushing attack.

Or 30...♗g7 31.♗f2 ♕a5 32.♗xb6 ♕xb6 33.♘xa4 and White wins as the knight on b3 is lost.

31.♘xa4 ♕b5 32.♗xc4 dxc4 33.♘c3

The bishop on d7 is lost, and the rest is quite simple for White.

33...♗xf5 34.gxf5 ♕a5 35.♘e4 ♗e7 36.♕xc4 ♗xh4 37.♘xh4
1–0

Final remarks

1. It is hard to find suggestions for Black to improve. While 21...♗d7 was certainly inconvenient, the position was simply inferior regardless. Black's problems started early on when White managed to arrange his pieces ideally before Black could create any concrete counterplay.
2. White's kingside attack runs smoothly because of his ideal control of the centre, and because the weakness of the d6-pawn is constantly distracting Black from other offensive or defensive tasks.

The following is a short example to illustrate how Black's queenside attempts may often fail or even backfire, proving the solidity of White's position.

Vladimir Malakhov – Baadur Jobava

Burgas 2012

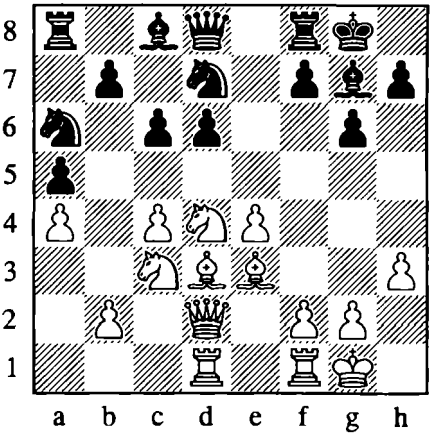
1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 g6 3.e4 d6 4.d4 ♗g7 5.♗d3 0–0 6.♘ge2 a6 7.0–0 c6

Aiming to expand on the queenside with ...b7-b5.

8.a4 a5

Now that the expansion is impossible, Black secures the control of the weakened b4-square.

9.h3 ♘a6 10.♗e3 ♘d7 11.♕d2 e5 12.♖ad1 exd4 13.♘xd4



We have reached the position of interest through a non-theoretical line, but the ideas are similar. Unlike the previous game, White has already weakened his queenside somewhat. When I was learning about this kind of position about ten years ago, I thought the weakening of the b4-square was enough for Black to secure an advantage, but this is very far from true, as we will see in this game.

13...♘dc5

The alternative was 13...♘ac5 14.♗c2 ♕b6 15.b3 ♕b4 when Black has taken control of

the b4-square, but what can he do now? 16.f4 ♖e8 (if 16...♗xd4? 17.♕xd4 ♘xb3 hoping to gain a pawn, but 18.♗xb3 ♕xb3 19.♖b1 ♕a3 20.♖f3 and Black's queen is nearly trapped since 20...♕c5 is simply met by 21.♕d3 ♕h5 22.♕xd6 when Black is defenceless due to the weakened dark squares and his poor piece coordination) 17.♗f2± White's position is preferable, as he can expand on the kingside, while Black's queenside plans have come to a dead end.

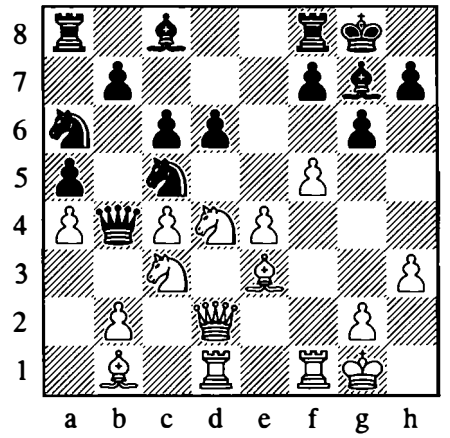
Of course 13...♘b4 14.♗b1 and the knight on b4 does not help much.

14.♗b1 ♕b6 15.f4 ♕b4

Black seems to be doing OK so far, but:

16.f5!±

This energetic reaction refutes Black's attempts on the queenside. White is ready to give up a pawn on the queenside in order to get a winning kingside attack.



16...♘xa4?

This natural move has a thematic refutation.

16...♕xc4?

This does not help.

17.♗a2 ♕b4 18.♕f2!

White's attack is just winning, for example:

18...gxf5

The only move.

18...♔h8? 19.f6+–

18...♗d7? 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.♗xf7† ♔h7 21.♕h4†+–

19.♘xf5 ♗xf5 20.exf5

Threatening f5-f6.

20...♗f6 21.♖xd6+–

Note how Black's queen and knights are mere spectators in this fight.

The best defence was 16...♘d7 heading to the kingside, but after 17.♗h6 ♘f6 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♕f4± White's kingside attack is overwhelming.

17.f6!

Locking Black's bishop out of the game.

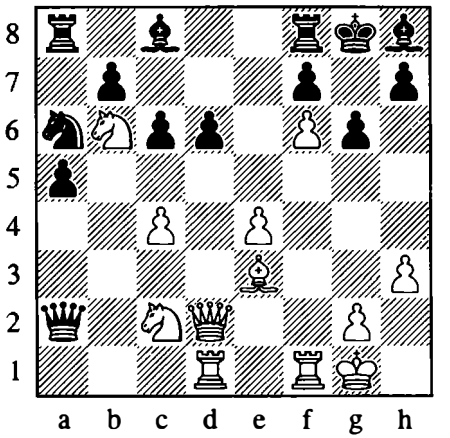
17...♗h8

And now the key move:

18.♘c2!

The awkward location of Black's queen suddenly becomes evident.

18...♕b3 19.♗a2 ♕xb2 20.♘xa4 ♕xa2 21.♘b6+–



The queen is trapped! The reader should understand this is not a coincidence. It is very easy for Black to get his queen trapped in this kind of position.

21...♗e6

Or: 21...♕b2 22.♗d4 ♕b3 23.♖f3 ♕a2 24.♖a1+–

22.♖a1 ♕b3

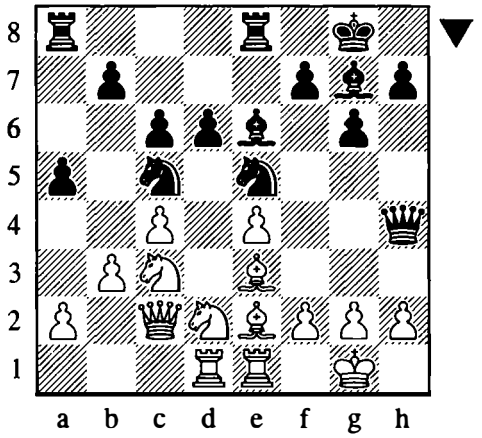
Here Black resigned before 23.♖a3 ♕b2 24.♗d4 when the queen is dead.

1–0

Final remarks

1. It is essential to note how the weak b4-square was not all that useful to Black. For this reason, White players should be willing to play a2-a4 if needed.
2. Black's queen getting trapped in this position was by no means a coincidence. This is a recurring problem for Black, which even I have experienced several times; most recently in the game Swiercz – Flores Rios, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

Black's ...f7-f5 break



The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Bauer – McShane**, Germany 2003. We have a typical open King's Indian where Black is doing well so far. In order to secure a good position in the long term, Black uses his initiative to achieve the break:

22...f5!

This move disputes the centre, and after:

23.f4

But not: 23.exf5? ♗xf5 24.♕c1 ♘cd3–+

23...♘ed7 24.♘f3

Again not: 24.exf5? ♗xf5 25.♕c1 ♖xe3–+

24...♕e7

Black is already better. The game could have continued with:

25.♘g5

Or 25.♗d3 ♘xd3 26.♖xd3 ♗xc4! 27.bxc4 fxe4 28.♘xe4 ♕xe4∓ with pressure.

Instead the game continued 25.e5? dxe5 26.fxe5 ♘xe5∓ when White had no compensation for the pawn, and he lost eventually.

25...fxe4 26.♘cxe4 ♗f5 27.♗xc5 ♘xc5 28.♗f3

But now after:

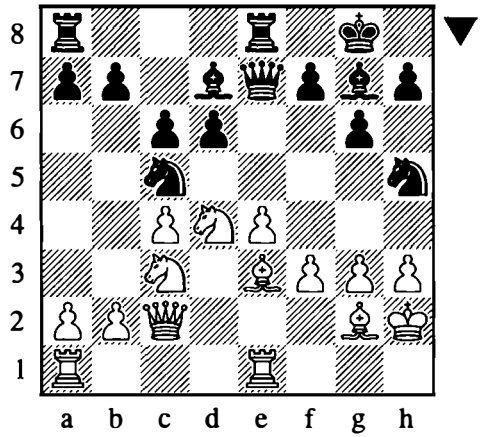
28...♕f8!

Threatening ..♗xe4 followed by ...♕xf4.

29.♕c1 h6 30.♘xc5 dxc5 31.♘e4 a4!∓

Black has taken the lead.

Black uses ...g6-g5 to prevent White's f3-f4

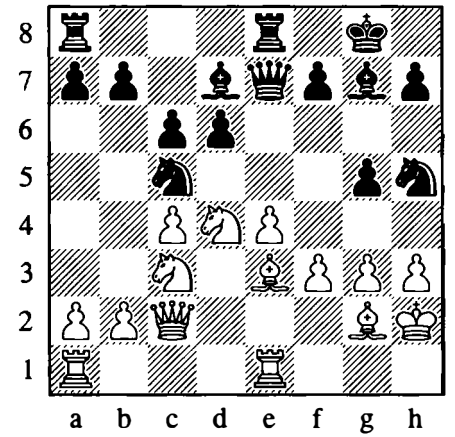


The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Brynell – Pavlidis**, Malta 2012. White wishes to consolidate his position with f3-f4 and

later pressure the d6-pawn, as in Meier – Feller. Black managed to prevent this plan with:

15...g5!?

Covering the f4-square. This double-edged move saves the day for Black.



16.♖ad1?!

Occupying the f5-square with 16.♘f5?! ♗xf5 17.exf5 ♗e5 18.♗f2 ♕f6 yields a complicated position.

Better was 16.♕d2! h6 17.♖ad1 (but not 17.f4? gxf4 18.gxf4 ♕h4∓), as 17...♗e5? is now met by 18.f4! gxf4 19.gxf4 ♗f6 20.♘de2! when Black's position collapses, though after 17...♖ad8!? 18.♕f2 ♗f6 19.♖g1 ♔h8 Black has a playable position.

16...♗e5!

As we will soon see in Arutinian – Efimenko, this move is very helpful, both covering f4 and protecting d6.

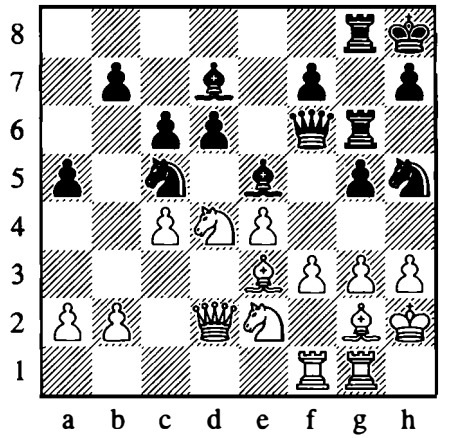
17.♗f2?!

Too passive; White errs on the defensive side now.

If 17.♘de2 ♘e6 White remains unable to play f3-f4, and insisting with 18.♕d2 runs into: 18...♘xg3! 19.♘xg3 h5 (threatening ...h4) 20.♗xg5 ♕xg5 21.♕xg5† ♘xg5 22.h4 ♔h8! 23.♘ce2 ♘e6 Followed by ...♖g8 with a balanced game.

Instead 17.♘ce2!? seems more promising as 17...♘e6? (instead 17...d5!? deserves attention) now loses to 18.♘f5.

17...♕f6 18.♘ce2 a5 19.♕d2 ♔h8 20.♖g1 ♖g8 21.♖df1 ♖g6 22.♗e3 ♖ag8∓



Black is a little better, though it is not obvious yet how to create concrete threats. Nevertheless, it is clear White does not have any active plans, and now he fell for a trick after:

23.♕xa5? ♘xg3!–+

A nice blow based on the poor location of White's queen.

24.♘xg3 ♗xg3† 25.♔h1

Or: 25.♔xg3 ♕e5† 26.♔f2 ♘xe4† 27.fxe4 ♕xa5–+

25...♖h6 26.♘f5 ♗xf5 27.exf5 ♕xf5

And the threat of ...♖xh3 decides the game.

0–1

David Arutinian – Zahar Efimenko

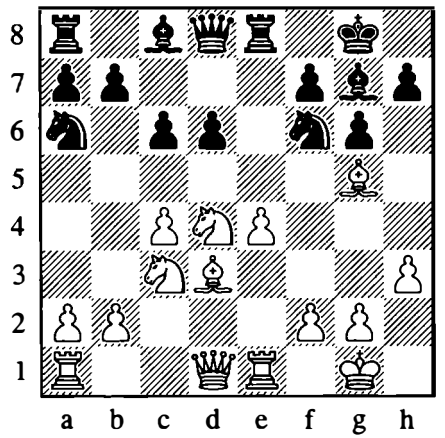
Dresden 2007

Learning objective: This game is an example of how Black may gain counterplay with the idea ...g6-g5-g4.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.h3 ♘a6 7.♗g5 c6 8.♗d3 e5 9.0–0 exd4 10.♘xd4

We have reached the position of interest and the reader should notice how White's pieces are strangely arranged for the structure, say compared to the earlier example Meier – Feller. White needs to find the time to play ♖e1-♗f1-♕d2, after which he should be able to secure a small advantage.

10...♖e8 11.♖e1



11...h6

Black could play:

11...♕b6 12.♘b3 ♘d7 13.♗e3 ♕c7 14.♗f1!?

This yields an interesting variation, but 14.♘d4 secures a small advantage after: 14...♘ac5 15.♗c2 a5 16.b3±

14...♘ac5 15.♗d4 ♗e5 16.♕d2

Preparing f2-f4.

16...♘e6!

Inviting an unfavourable trade.

17.♗e3

But not 17.♗xe5?! dxe5 which is studied in the next chapter.

17...♘dc5 18.♘d4 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♘e6!

The same idea again.

20.♗e3

Again not: 20.♗xe5?! dxe5∓

20...♘c5

The position is approximately balanced.

21.♗d4!?

Or 21.♖ad1 a5.

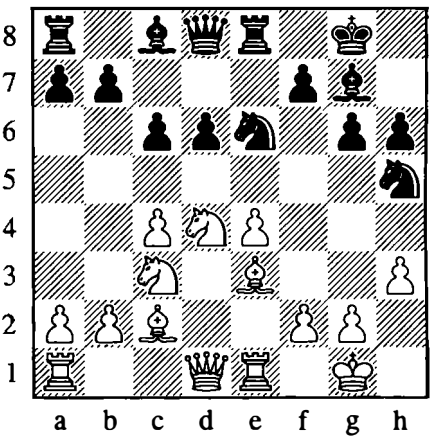
21...♘e6=

12.♗f4 ♘c5

White obtains a comfortable position after: 12...♘d7 13.♗f1 ♕f6 14.♗e3 ♘ac5 15.♕c2±

13.♗c2 ♘h5 14.♗e3 ♘e6!

Proposing an exchange is often a good idea.



15.♘xe6

If 15.♕d2 ♗xd4! 16.♗xd4 ♘ef4 Black gains good counterplay. For example: 17.♔h2 ♕h4 18.♖h1! The only defence (but not 18.♘e2? ♘xg2! and suddenly Black wins after 19.♔xg2 ♗xh3† 20.♔f3 [or 20.♔g1 ♕g4†] 20...♗g4† 21.♔e3 ♕h3†). 18...♘xg2!? 19.♔xg2 ♗xh3† 20.♖xh3 ♘f4† 21.♕xf4 ♕xf4 With a complicated game.

On the other hand 15.♘f3 is met by: 15...♘g5! 16.♘xg5 (better is 16.♗d3!? heading to f1 with a safe position) 16...hxg5 17.♕d2 ♘f4 18.♗xf4 gxf4 19.♕xf4 ♗e5 20.♕f3 ♗e6 21.♗d3 ♕g5∞ White must be careful in light of the threat of ...♔g7 and ...♖h8xh3.

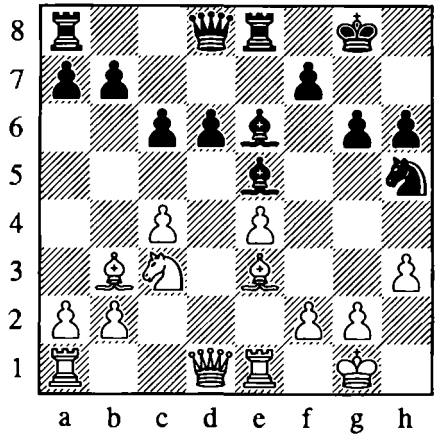
15...♗xe6 16.♗b3?!

On principle this cannot be a good move. The bishop is useless on b3, and it is too far from the kingside, and so unable to participate in its defence.

Far more logical is 16.♗d3 ♗e5 17.♗f1 ♘f4 18.♕d2 ♕f6 19.♖ad1 when Black is doing fine, but at least White's kingside is safe for the moment.

16...♗e5!

An important move, preventing White's f2-f4 advance and creating chances for a kingside attack. Black is not worse.



17.♕f3?

The queen will become the subject of an attack.

Better was

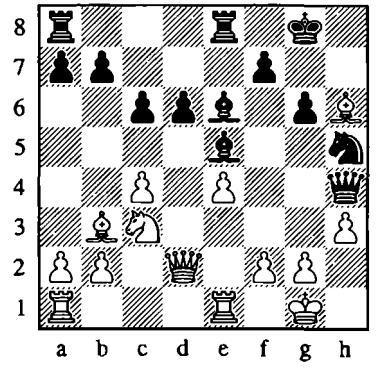
17.♗xh6 ♕h4!

Threatening ...g6-g5 and ...♗xh3, and the only defence is:

18.♕d2!

Instead 18.♗e3? loses to 18...♗xh3! 19.gxh3 ♕xh3. For example: 20.f4 (waiting with 20.♖c1 allows forced mate with 20...♗h2† 21.♔h1 ♗g3† 22.♔g1 ♘f4! 23.♗xf4 ♕h2† 24.♔f1 ♕xf2#) 20...♕g3† 21.♔f1 ♗xc3 22.bxc3 ♖xe4–+

But now:



18...♗xh3!

This yields a draw by force.

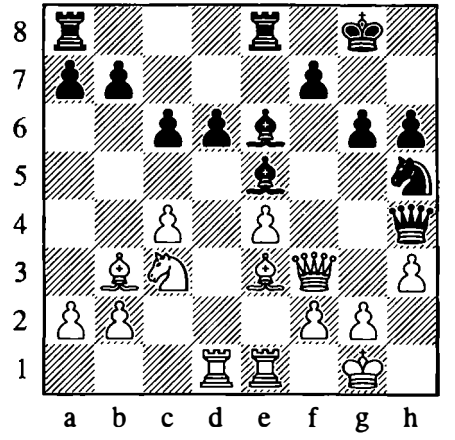
18...♘f4!?⩱ could also be considered.

19.gxh3 ♕xh3 20.f4 ♗d4†! 21.♕xd4 ♕g3† 22.♔f1 ♕f3†=

With perpetual check, since 23.♕f2?? loses to 23...♘g3† 24.♔g1 ♕h1#.

17...♕h4 18.♖ad1

Of course not 18.♗xh6? as after 18...g5! the bishop is trapped and 19.g3 does not help in view of: 19...♘xg3 20.fxg3 ♗d4†! 21.♔f1 ♕xh3† 22.♕g2 ♕xh6–+

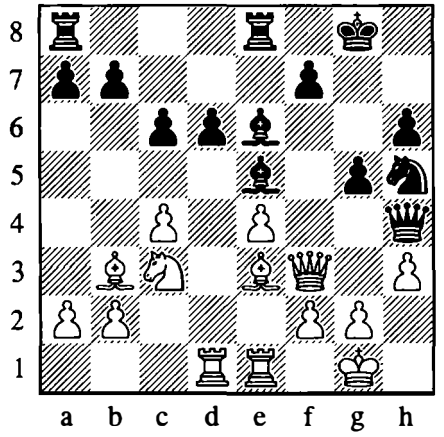


18...g5!∓

The move ...g6-g5 is a recurring idea for Black in this position. It can serve two purposes:

1. Preventing White from achieving the favourable f2-f4.

2. Preparing the ...g5-g4 break to gain counterplay. Obviously this is Black's plan here, taking advantage of White's awkwardly-placed queen.

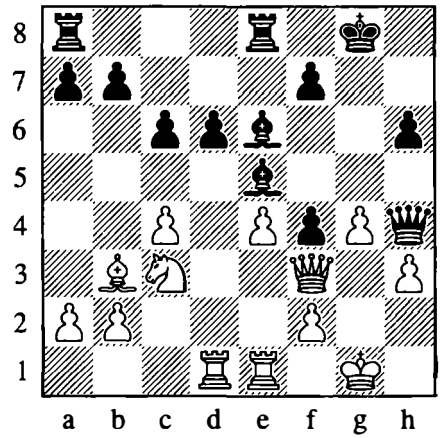


19.g4

If 19.♗d4? g4! 20.♕e3 (but not 20.hxg4? ♗xg4–+) 20...gxh3 21.♗xe5 dxe5 22.g3 ♕g5∓ and Black is a clear pawn up.

Instead 19.♕e2 is met by: 19...♘f4 (19...g4 no longer works due to 20.g3! ♕xh3 21.♕d2!? followed by ♗xh6: Black's queen is awkwardly placed) 20.♗xf4 gxf4! Black will use the g-file (or 20...♕xf4 21.g3 ♕f6∓ when White cannot expand with f2-f4). 21.♕f3 ♔h7 22.♔f1 ♖g8 23.♔e2 ♕f6 24.♖d3 ♖g6 25.♖g1 ♖ag8∓ White's position is extremely uncomfortable and fragile.

19...♘f4 20.♗xf4 gxf4



21.c5?!

A sign of desperation, giving up a pawn in order to trade Black's powerful bishop on e6 for the otherwise useless bishop on b3. Unfortunately, White will be a pawn down for no compensation.

It was better to attempt a defence with: 21.♖d3 ♔h7 22.♔f1 ♖ad8 23.♖ed1 (but not 23.♔e2? due to 23...f5! 24.gxf5 ♗xf5∓ 25.exf5?? ♗xc3† 26.♔d1 ♖xe1†–+) 23...♖g8!?∓ Even so, White's position is difficult to handle due to the latent ...h6-h5 break.

21...♗xb3 22.axb3 dxc5∓

The rest of the game bears no relevance to us, though Black exploited his advantage very easily.

Final remarks

1. White's biggest mistake was playing 16.♗b3, as this bishop was needed in the defence of the kingside.
2. Black's post-opening sequence (moves 11-18) deserve to be praised. Note how Black keeps the threats coming, managing to trade one minor piece, prevent f2-f4 with 16...♗e5, and then even create a kingside attack with 18...♕h4.
3. From a static perspective (ignoring tactics or the initiative) Black's ...g6-g5-g4 break does not look good. By trading his g-pawn for White's h-pawn Black weakens his structure significantly. The point here is that Black cannot afford to obtain a passive position and this plan is a great method for obtaining activity. If Black executes the ...g6-g5-g4 break well, then White will not have the time to take advantage of Black's structural weaknesses.

The following game is an interesting example from my own experience. I had always had trouble with this structure and I spent the first few hours of the game just hoping to lose in an honourable way, yet somehow things worked out for me in the end. This game has many flaws, but I think we can learn much from the mistakes both players made.

Jaan Ehlvest – Mauricio Flores Rios

Sao Paulo 2009

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘a6 8.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♗g5 ♕e8 10.♖e1 c6?!

A questionable move. My theoretical knowledge was very limited, so I chose to play schematically, just hoping things would turn out OK.

Theory recommends 10...exd4 11.♘xd4 (or 11.♘d5!?) 11...♕e5 12.♘f3 ♕c5 13.♗h4 when White's forces are somewhat uncoordinated, which compensates for the space advantage, so chances are almost balanced.

11.h3 h6

This is a standard response.

12.♗c1

Another option was 12.♗h4 ♘f6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♕d6± as in Smirnov – Savitskiy, Moscow 2013.

It is a bad idea to give up the bishop with 12.hxg4?! hxg5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♘xg5 ♕e7! 15.♘h3 (or 15.♘f3 ♗xg4∓) 15...♘c5∓ and Black will follow up with...♘e6-d4 gaining the superior position.

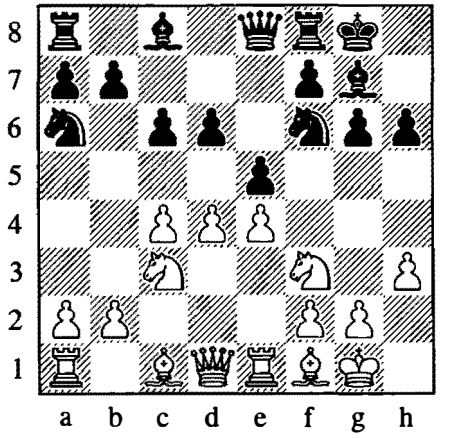
12...♘f6

I did not want to clarify the centre with 12...exd4 as 13.♘xd4 ♘f6 14.♗f1± is pleasant for White.

13.♗f1

Black's position is already very uncomfortable.

An alternative was 13.♗e3 ♕e7 14.♗f1 ♖e8 where I was hoping to maintain a flexible centre until White decided to play 15.d5 c5 transposing into a King's Indian Type II structure. The problem for Black is that White can just play 15.♕d2 ♔h7 16.♖ad1!?± to continue with a2-a3, b2-b4 and only then clarify the centre. Black is in trouble as he cannot create effective counterplay.



13...♘h5?!

Hoping to keep the central tension forever, and heading toward f4. But this idea is unlikely to work.

White was also better after 13...♕e7 14.♗e3 ♖e8 15.♕d2 ♔h7 16.♖ad1± as explained above.

At this point defining the centre with 13...exd4 does not work well either, since after 14.♕xd4! ♕e6 15.♗f4 the d6-pawn cannot be protected as 15...♖d8? loses to 16.♕d2! ♔h7 17.e5.

14.g3?!

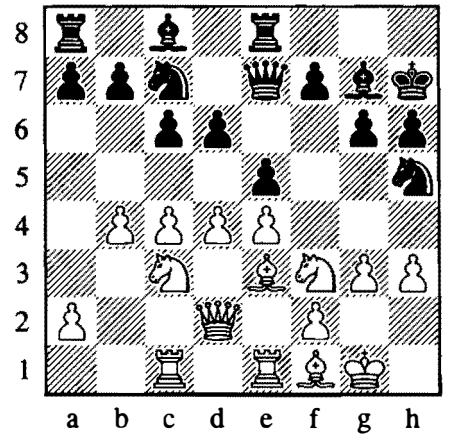
There is no need for this move.

Stronger was 14.♗e3 when the natural 14...♕e7 (or 14...♘f4 15.c5!±) is met by the thematic 15.c5! exd4 (if 15...dxc5?! 16.dxe5 White is winning, say after 16...♗xe5 17.♘xe5 ♕xe5 18.♗xh6 ♖e8 19.♗xa6 bxa6 20.♕d2) 16.●xd6 ♕xd6 17.e5 ♕e7 18.♕xd4± Black's knight is misplaced on h5.

14...♕e7 15.♗e3 ♘c7 16.♖c1 ♖e8 17.♕d2 ♔h7

Still hoping to keep the central tension forever, though after:

18.b4!



The positional threats, d4-d5 or c4-c5, became too strong and I had to release the centre. By now I felt my position was close to collapse.

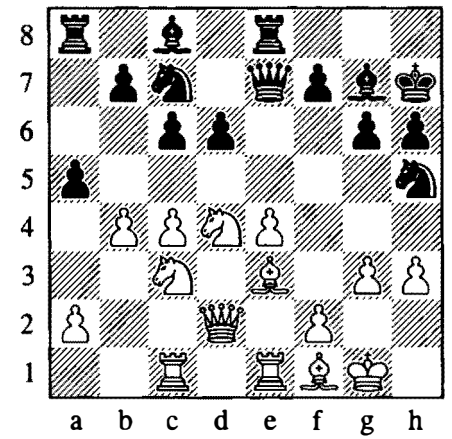
18...exd4 19.♘xd4

An option was 19.♗xd4!? as trading dark-squared bishops favours White significantly: 19...♘f6 20.e5! dxe5 21.♗xe5 ♗f5 22.c5!?± Black's position is very uncomfortable.

19...a5?!

Hoping to open the a-file.

A healthier alternative was 19...♘e6 attempting to trade off some pieces to reduce the space problem: 20.♘xe6 (20.♘de2?! is met by 20...♘g5! when Black takes the lead) 20...♗xe6 21.♖ed1 ♖ed8 22.g4 ♘f6 23.f4± Black is in trouble that is similar to Meier – Feller, but the game is far from over.



20.a3?

A serious and very instructive mistake. The opening of the a-file will create plenty of counterplay for Black.

Correct was 20.b5! keeping the a-file closed and forcing the creation of more weaknesses: 20...♘e6 (or 20...c5 21.♘f3± and the d6-pawn is a serious weakness) 21.♘xe6 ♗xe6 22.♖ed1 ♖ed8 23.♘a4± With a dominating position.

20...axb4 21.axb4 ♖a3!?

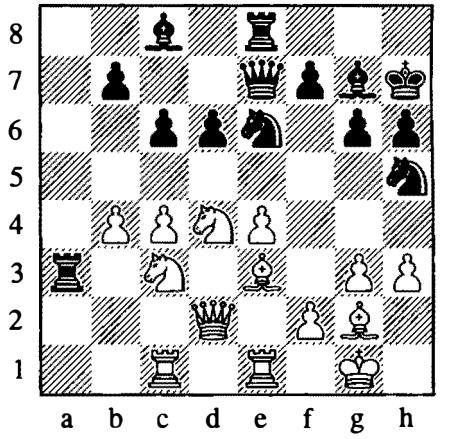
Black's pieces can breathe again, and suddenly I felt I had some chances to survive.

22.♗g2

If 22.♕b2 ♖a8 and Black is fine. But not 22.♖a1?! due to: 22...♖xc3! 23.♕xc3 c5∓

22...♘e6

Of course I was not going to miss an opportunity to trade off minor pieces.



23.♘xe6

It would be desirable to keep pieces on the board with 23.♘de2 but after: 23...♘g5! 24.♔h2 ♘f6 25.f3 ♕d7!? White cannot easily neutralize Black's play as 26.h4? (correct is 26.♘g1!=) runs into the nice tactical shot: 26...♘xf3†! 27.♗xf3 ♕h3† 28.♔g1 ♘g4 29.♗xg4 ♗xg4 30.♖f1 ♖xc3! Note how Black's rook on a3 suddenly plays a crucial role: 31.♘xc3 ♕xg3† 32.♔h1 ♗f3† 33.♖xf3 ♕xf3† 34.♔g1 f5!∓

23...♗xe6

Chances are level, as Black has obtained reasonable counterplay. Something to know about this structure is that once Black manages to free his position, he will not fall into a passive position again.

24.g4 ♘f6 25.♗f4 ♖d8 26.♘d5

This looks strong, but it is nothing special due to:

26...♕f8

Of course not: 26...cxd5? 27.exd5±

27.♘e3

Keeping knights on the board, but this will not help White much.

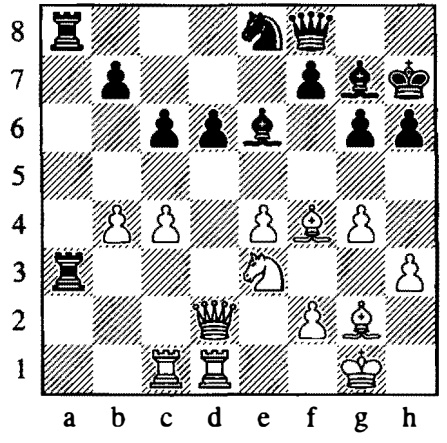
If 27.♘xf6† ♗xf6 28.♖ed1 ♗e7 and the position is equal.

27...♘e8

Protecting the d6-pawn, covering the a1-square, and preparing to free the rook on d8 to invade down the a-file.

A worthy alternative was 27...h5!? 28.g5 ♘e8 29.♖ed1 ♖da8. This is similar to the game but with the inclusion of ...h6-h5 and ...g5-g4.

28.♖ed1 ♖da8



It is now White who must play for equality.

29.♗g3

Taking the pawn with 29.♗xd6?! is met by: 29...♕xd6 30.♕xd6 ♘xd6 31.♖xd6 ♗f8 32.♖dd1 ♗xb4∓

29...♖a2 30.♕e1 g5!?

A double-edged decision, intended to prevent f2-f4. After studying the previous two examples, this move seems natural, though it was not an easy decision for me back then. Black's strategy consists of blockading the dark squares with ...♗e5.

A more solid option was: 30...♕h8!? 31.♖d3 (the expansion 31.f4?! is met by 31...♗b2! 32.♖b1 ♗d4 33.♗f2 ♗xc4→) 31...♖8a3 32.♖xa3 ♖xa3 33.b5 ♖a2∓ When Black's position is preferable.

31.c5

A logical decision, undermining Black's control of e5, thus preventing ...♗e5.

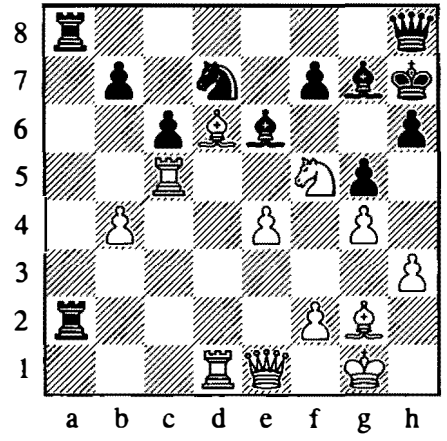
31...dxc5 32.♖xc5 ♘f6

Planning ...♘d7 disputing the control of e5.

33.♘f5 ♘d7 34.♗d6

If 34.♖cc1 then 34...♗e5!∓ gaining control of the dark squares, and keeping the bishop on g2 restricted.

34...♕h8



35.e5!?

A very interesting resource, played just as we approached the time control. White sacrifices an exchange in order to obtain a dangerous attack against Black's king. Fortunately for me, tactics were my forte, and I was able to respond. The rest of the game is unrelated to the topic of this chapter, but it is fun to watch, therefore I will leave it with some comments.

If 35.♖cc1 ♗e5!?∓ and Black achieves his goal of controlling the dark squares. White's position would become very uncomfortable.

Correct was 35.♘xg7 ♕xg7 36.♖cc1 ♘e5 37.♖c5 ♘d7 38.♖cc1 and the game could have ended in a draw, or I could choose 38...h5!? to continue the fight.

35...♘xc5 36.bxc5 ♕e8 37.h4 ♖8a4 38.♗e4 ♗d5!

An essential move. Suddenly White's king is also at risk.

39.♘d4†

If 39.♗b1 then 39...♖xg4† 40.♘g3† ♔g8 41.♗xa2 ♗xa2∓ and White's kingside attack is over.

39...♔g8 40.hxg5 hxg5 41.♗b1 ♕c8!

A strong intermediate move.

42.♗f5

Of course not: 42.♗xa2?? ♕xg4† 43.♔f1 ♗g2† 44.♔g1 ♗f3† 45.♔h2 ♕g2#

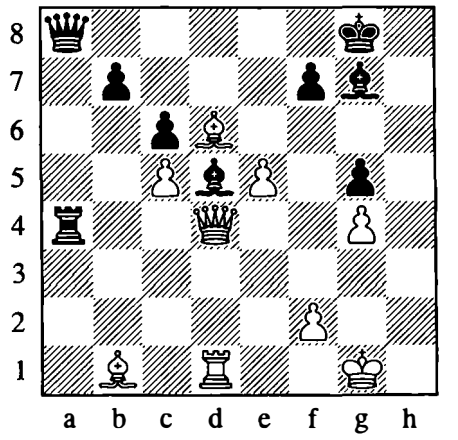
42...♕a8–+

Black has gained the time to reach a8 with the queen, and now the position is clearly winning for me.

43.♗b1 ♖a1 44.♕e3 ♖xd4!?

Simpler was: 44...♖b4! 45.♕d3 ♖bxb1 46.♖xb1 ♕a2! 47.♖xa1 ♕xa1† 48.♕f1 (48.♔h2? ♕h1† 49.♔g3 ♕g2#) 48...♕xd4–+

45.♕xd4 ♖a4



46.♕d3 ♖xg4† 47.♔h2 ♖g2† 48.♔h1 ♖g4† 49.♔h2 ♖h4† 50.♔g3 ♕c8

Neater was: 50...♕a4! 51.♕f5 ♖h3†! 52.♕xh3 (52.♔xh3 ♕h4#) 52...♕f4#

51.♕f5

No better is: 51.e6 ♕xe6 52.♕f5 ♖h3†!! 53.♕xh3 (53.♔xh3 ♕h6† 54.♔g3 ♕h4#) 53...♗e5† 54.f4 ♗xf4† 55.♗xf4 gxf4† 56.♔h2 ♕e2†–+

51...♗e6 52.♕c2 ♖h3† 53.♔g2 ♗d5†

White resigns. Mate is unavoidable after: 54.♔f1 ♕g4 55.♔e1 ♕b4†! For example: 56.♔f1 ♗g2†! 57.♔xg2 (or 57.♔g1 ♗f3) 57...♕g4† 58.♔f1 ♖h1#

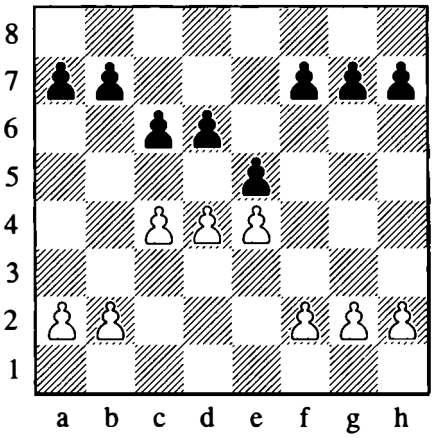
0–1

Final remarks

1. Black was unable to maintain the central tension and was eventually forced to play ...exd4 obtaining an open King's Indian. It would have been better to accept this pawn structure with 10...exd4 and begin searching for counterplay before White could consolidate his position.
2. White's biggest mistake was 20.a3, allowing the a-file to be opened. From this point on, Black's play was a good model of how Black may obtain counterplay.
3. The advance ...g6-g5 (as I chose on move 30) is not quite as uncommon as one might expect for such a wild-looking move. We have already seen some examples earlier in the chapter.

Chapter 18

KID Complex



This structure is most typically obtained from the King's Indian and the Old Indian Defences, though it can also appear in the Ruy Lopez. I decided to name this structure *King's Indian Complex* to be consistent with the term introduced by Soltis in the 1970's. This structure is called a 'complex' because it is a highly flexible structure open to many possibilities. In fact, this structure could transpose to seven (!) structures we have previously discussed in this book, and here we still need to discuss some independent structural developments.

Here follows the outline of possible structure transformations:

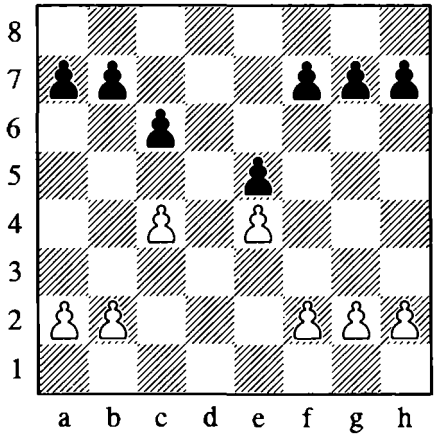
1. White plays d4-d5, Black takes ...cxd5 and White replies exd5, we obtain a Najdorf Type I (Chapter 8).
2. White plays d4-d5, Black takes ...cxd5 and White recaptures with a piece, we obtain a Najdorf Type II (Chapter 9).
3. White plays d4-d5, Black takes ...cxd5 and White replies cxd5, to obtain a King's Indian Type I (Chapter 14).
4. White plays d4-d5 and Black replies ...c6-c5, then we obtain a King's Indian Type II (Chapter 15).
5. White plays d4-d5 while Black's pawn was still on c7, then we obtain a King's Indian Type III (Chapter 16).
6. Black takes ...exd4, then we obtain an Open King's Indian (Chapter 17)

And in this chapter we will consider two additional possibilities:

7. White takes with dxe5 and Black replies ...dxe5. This chapter will mostly focus on ideas about this structure.
8. White breaks with c4-c5, blowing up the centre. This break will probably give White a favourable version of a 4–2 vs. 3–3 structure, which was mentioned in Chapter 3.

Despite the long list of structures and possibilities mentioned above, I believe the most common outcomes from a King's Indian complex are 4, 5 and 7, and since Cases 4 and 5 have been previously studied, four of the five games in this chapter will be devoted to studying the structure resulting from Case 7. The last game in the chapter will be an example of White's c4-c5 break.

White takes dxe5 and Black replies ...dxe5



This structure occurs when pawns are traded on e5 in a King's Indian complex; it is essentially the only structure with an independent value, i.e. a structure not discussed in previous chapters. Despite the apparent symmetry of the position there is a visible imbalance due to the placement of the c-pawns. White's c4-pawn is more advanced giving some spatial advantage, especially if the pawn is further advanced with c4-c5. In contrast, Black's c6-pawn covers the important d5-square, preventing White's knight from going there. The strategic battle is based on this fact. Black will direct his efforts toward controlling the d4-square, while White will attempt to gain space, obtain other advantages and prevent Black from making use of d4. The specific plans are:

White's plans

1. Modify the structure with the c4-c5 advance. Later, place a piece on the new outpost on d6.
2. Defend the d4-square, and prevent Black from occupying it.
3. Expand on the queenside with a2-a3 and b2-b4. Control the d-file and possibly invade on the seventh rank.

Black's plans

1. Place a piece on the d4-square, preferably a knight.
2. Control the dark squares in general; trade dark-squared bishops. Also, play ...a7-a5 and place a knight on c5.
3. Create kingside play with ...f7-f5, especially as a distraction to White's queenside plans.

White's Plan 1 is by far the most important and the beginning moves in this structure will rotate around it, as White wants to achieve it while Black desires to prevent it. If this advance can be permanently banned, then Black will generally be doing well. In contrast, if White manages to play c4-c5 then Black will need to react quickly, and Plan 3 (...f7-f5 with kingside play) is most likely to be the right approach.

The first two examples in this chapter illustrate Black's dark-squared strategy – the control of the d4-square and the prevention of White's c4-c5 advance. Later, the third game showcases an easy victory for White after the c4-c5 advance is achieved. The fourth game in the chapter illustrates how Black responds to White's c4-c5 advance by creating kingside play with ...f7-f5.

Although I usually prefer recent top games over older games, I could not resist the temptation to begin this chapter with one of Kasparov's classic games, against Danailov from 1980. This game is a superb example of Black's dream strategy in this position. White certainly made some serious mistakes, but these mistakes are very illustrative and deserve study.

Silvio Danailov – Garry Kasparov

World U20 Championship, Dortmund 1980

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an illustration of Black's dream position after White captures with dxe5.
2. The key is in the control of dark squares particularly the d4-square.

1.c4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.d4 ♘f6 5.e4 0–0 6.♗e2 e5

Despite the fact that Black has not had the time to play ...c7-c6 yet, White begins to treat this position as a King's Indian Complex and decides to transform the structure with:

7.dxe5

Transferring into the previous chapter's structure with 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 is far more common.

7...dxe5

The central tension has been released and White's spatial advantage is practically nonexistent. Black's main goal is to gain control of the d4-square, while White will intend to play c4-c5 after Black plays ...c7-c6, in order to gain an outpost on d6.

8.♕xd8 ♖xd8 9.♗g5 ♘bd7

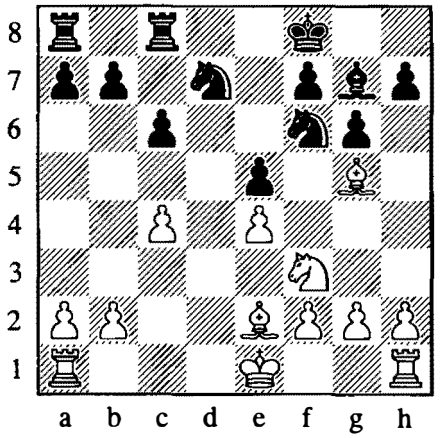
Today's top players prefer: 9...♖e8 10.♘d5!? Changing the structure once again. 10...♘xd5 11.cxd5 c6 Getting rid of the backward c7-pawn. 12.♗c4 cxd5 13.♗xd5 ♘d7 With a fairly drawish position.

10.♘d5?!

Certainly not the best, as it helps Black improve his piece coordination significantly.

Better was 10.0–0–0 ♖f8 11.♘d5 c6 12.♘e7† ♔h8 13.♗e3 ♖e8 14.♘xc8 ♖axc8 15.g4± when White has a small plus due to his initiative, as in the game Jakovenko – Paragua, Tromsø (1.2) 2013.

10...c6 11.♘e7† ♔f8 12.♘xc8 ♖dxc8



This is really the point where the game becomes interesting. White's e4-pawn is quite vulnerable, and there is little hope of ever achieving c4-c5 to create an outpost on d6. Thus, only Black has a clear target in this position (the d4-square) though the position is still level.

13.0–0–0

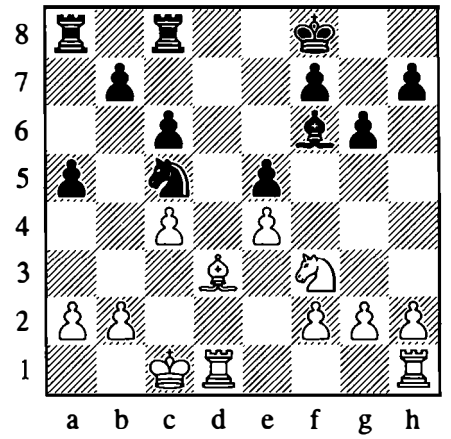
Better was 13.♘d2 protecting e4, and after 13...♘c5 14.f3 ♘e6 15.♗e3 ♘d4 the position is level.

13...♘c5 14.♗xf6?

This seemingly forced move is a huge positional concession, as it gives away control of the dark squares, which is the key to Black's strategy in this position.

White's last chance to maintain equality was the tricky: 14.♗e3! ♘fxe4 (or 14...♘cxe4 15.♘xe5=) 15.♘d2 When Black is a pawn up, but cannot quite organize his pieces. 15...b6 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗f3 ♘f6 18.g3 e4 19.♗g2 With approximately level chances, as Black is tied to the defence of the e4-pawn after: 19...♖e8 20.h3 ♖e7 21.♖he1 ♖ae8 22.♖e2!?

14...♗xf6 15.♗d3 a5!∓



We have reached an important position. It might seem an exaggeration to call this position "clear advantage to Black" but this is not the case. White does have a very bad position already, for the following reasons:

1. Black has undisputed control of the dark squares.
2. The d4-square is weak and will soon become a target of Black's strategy.
3. White's bishop is useless on d3 and does not have a better square to go to.
4. There are no weaknesses in Black's camp, hence there is nothing useful White can aim for.

16.♖he1 ♖e8

Protecting the e5-pawn to release the bishop.

17.♗f1?!

A poor defence, as now the e4-pawn lacks protection.

A slightly better defence was 17.♗c2 though Black continues with his plan: 17...♗d8 18.b3 ♗b6 19.a3 f6 20.♔b2 (or 20.b4?! axb4 21.axb4 ♘a6–+) 20...♘e6 21.♖f1 ♗c5∓ Preventing b3-b4, when Black dominates the board.

17...♗d8!

A nice bishop manoeuvre! We have already seen this manoeuvre twice before, in the games Polgar – Dominguez (Chapter 8) and Stojanovic – Ding Liren (Chapter 14). I hope the reader can appreciate the beauty in this similarity. This bishop was useless on f6, and now it is heading to a much more active square, either with ...♗b6, or ...a5-a4 followed by ...♗a5.

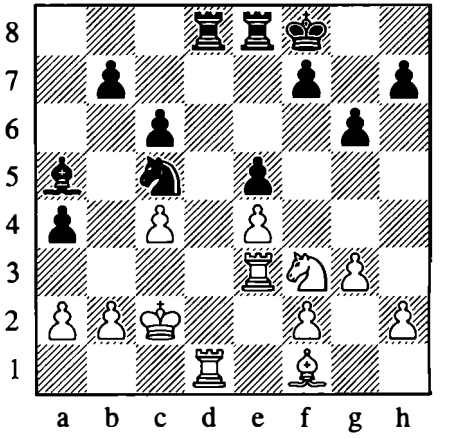
18.g3 a4 19.♔c2 ♗a5

Driving White's rook away from e1.

20.♖e3

And now:

20...♖ad8!–+



White has lost control of the d-file, and his position becomes hopeless. Black will improve his position slowly, to finally penetrate decisively down the d-file.

21.♖xd8

21.♗e2 does not help: 21...♖xd1 22.♗xd1 ♖d8 23.h4 h5 The position arising is very similar to the game.

21...♖xd8 22.♗h3

22.♗d3 does not make a difference, as after 22...f6 23.♗f1 ♔e7 24.♗e2 h5 25.♗f1 g5 Black wins as he did in the game.

22...f6 23.♖e2 ♔e7 24.♗g2

If 24.♖e3 (preventing ...♘c5-d3) then 24...♘a6 threatening ...♘b4, and now 25.a3

♘c5 is essentially the same position as in the game.

24...♘d3

Threatening ...♘b4.

25.a3 ♘c5

And now the b3-square is weak.

26.h4 h5 27.♖e3 g5!

The threat of ...g5-g4 makes White's position collapse.

28.hxg5 fxg5 29.♖e2

The e5-pawn is immune to 29.♘xe5 due to: 29...♖d2† 30.♔b1 ♔f6 31.♘f3 ♖xf2–+

29...♘b3 30.♔b1 ♔f6

White resigns, in view of 31.♔c2 g4 32.♘h2 ♘d4† or 31.♘h2 ♖d1† 32.♔c2 ♖g1. The final position is rather picturesque; it gives a crystal-clear illustration of Black's dream plans in the position arising after White captures with dxe5.

0–1

Final remarks

1. Many King's Indian players are afraid of this Exchange Variation because they worry that White can secure a draw with it. I hope this example gives some ideas about how to play for an advantage once White commits any inaccuracies.
2. It is extremely important to remember White's positional mistake with 14.♗xf6. This trade gives up the control of the dark squares, which Black then uses in an ideal fashion.
3. Black took advantage of his dark-square dominance with great elegance and precision. Probably the most important part in imposing the advantage was the manoeuvre ...♗d8, ...a5-a4 and ...♗a5 turning an otherwise useless bishop into a powerful attacking piece.

Vadim Shishkin – Illya Nyzhnyk

Romania 2013

Learning objective: This game illustrates how the ideas presented in the previous example are applied in current practice.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0–0 6.♘f3 e5 7.♗e3 c6 8.dxe5?!

A rather unpopular move which shows little ambition; White scores much better with 8.d5 or 8.0–0.

8...dxe5 9.♕xd8

Keeping queens on with 9.♕c2!? deserves attention, and after 9...♕e7 10.h3 ♘bd7 11.0–0 ♘h5 12.♖fd1 ♘c5 13.b4 ♘e6 14.c5± ♘hf4 15.♗f1 ♘g5 16.♘xg5 ♕xg5 17.♔h1± White's position is somewhat easier to conduct.

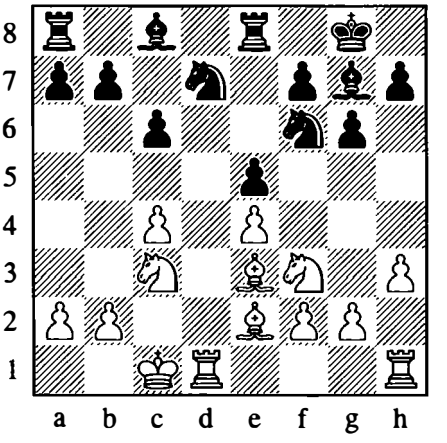
9...♖xd8

The queens are off the board and it is possible White just wants to play it safe, but it is not that trivial and Black has many ambitious continuations.

10.h3

If 10.♘xe5 ♘xe4 (or 10...♖e8!?) 11.♘xe4 ♗xe5 12.♗g5 ♖d4 13.♘d2 ♘a6 Black fully equalizes.

10...♘bd7 11.0–0–0 ♖e8



12.a3?!

White longs for a queenside expansion with b2-b4 and c4-c5, but he won't find the time for it and this move will just create a weakness.

The optimistic 12.b4? ♗f8 13.c5 (hoping for ♘d2-c4-d6) is met by 13...a5 14.a3 b6!∓ breaking White's queenside chain.

Doubling rooks with 12.♖d2 ♗f8 13.♖hd1 is far less effective than it might seem, and after 13...♘c5 (or 13...♗b4!?) 14.♖d8 ♖xd8 15.♖xd8 ♘e6! 16.♖d1 ♘d7 the d-file is useless and Black has a microscopic advantage as he may trade dark-squared bishops with ...♗c5.

An idea was 12.♘e1!? to answer 12...♗f8 with 13.♘d3± and the c5-square is covered, preventing Black's desired ...♘c5 or ...♗c5. But instead, Black could reply with 12...♘f8 13.♘d3 ♘6d7 to follow with ...♘e6-d4 when he is close to equality.

12...♗f8 13.♖he1

Of course not: 13.b4? a5 14.c5 b6!∓

13...♘c5

Trading dark-squared bishops with 13...♗c5 14.♗f1 ♗xe3† 15.♖xe3 is not as convenient because now it is difficult to prevent b2-b4 and c4-c5, and after this advance White's bishop will come to life with ♗c4. A possible continuation is: 15...a5 16.♘a4! ♖b8 17.c5 Fixing Black's queenside. 17...♘f8 18.♗c4±

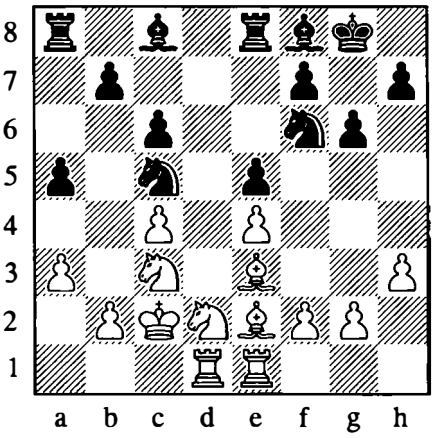
14.♘d2 a5

An important move, covering the b4-square and securing a nice square for the knight.

15.♔c2

The optimistic 15.b4? is obviously counterproductive due to 15...♘a6 (or the more tactical 15...axb4 16.axb4 ♘a4 17.♘a2 ♗e6 18.♔c2 b5! with serious threats) 16.bxa5 ♗xa3† 17.♔c2 ♗b4∓ when White's queenside pawns are destroyed.

15.b3 (to prevent ...a5-a4) is met by 15...♘h5 16.♔c2 ♘f4 17.♗f1 ♗e6∓ when Black is more comfortable.



15...a4

This move makes it clear that White is not doing well, as it bans permanently a queenside expansion based on b2-b4 due to ...axb3 destroying the pawn structure.

16.♗g5

The typical 16.g4!? weakens the f4-square but disrupts Black's play. However, in this position Black is coordinated enough after 16...♘e6 17.♘f3 ♘d7 18.h4 ♗c5∓ when he controls the dark squares.

16...♘fd7 17.♗g4

White was also doing badly after 17.♗e3 ♘e6 18.♘f3 f6∓ followed by ...♗c5, when Black slowly takes control over the game.

17...h5 18.♗xd7 ♘xd7∓

It is true that White's light-squared bishop can be a bad piece in this structure, as it is obstructed by the c4- and e4-pawns. However, giving up the pair of bishops will be costly as Black will find a way to open the position.

19.♘a2?!

White is possibly trying ♘c1-d3, but it is too slow.

An attempt was 19.g4 hxg4 20.hxg4 to open the h-file, and after 20...♗c5 21.♖h1 the naïve 21...♗xf2?! 22.♖h2 ♗c5?? (correct is 22...f6!=) is actually losing to 23.♖dh1.

But of course 19.g4 can be answered by 19...hxg4 20.hxg4 ♗c5 21.♖h1 f6!∓ with a big positional advantage.

A healthy response was: 19.♗e3 ♘c5 20.f3 f6∓

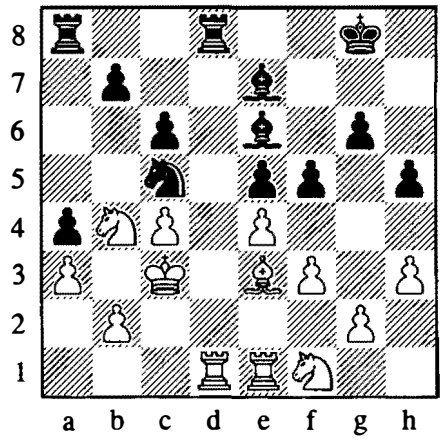
19...f6 20.♗e3 ♘c5 21.♘b4

If White goes back with 21.♘c3 ♗e6 22.f3 ♖ed8 Black progresses gradually, for example: 23.g4 ♔f7 24.gxh5 gxh5 25.h4 ♘d3 26.♖e2 ♗c5 27.♗xc5 ♘xc5∓ Following up with ...♖d4 and gaining full control of the dark squares.

21...♖d8 22.f3 ♗e6 23.♔c3 ♗e7 24.♘f1 f5!∓

Opening the position to increase the action of the pair of bishops.

Or 24...♔f7 25.♖xd8 ♖xd8 26.♘d2 h4∓ preparing a future ...f6-f5 is strong too.



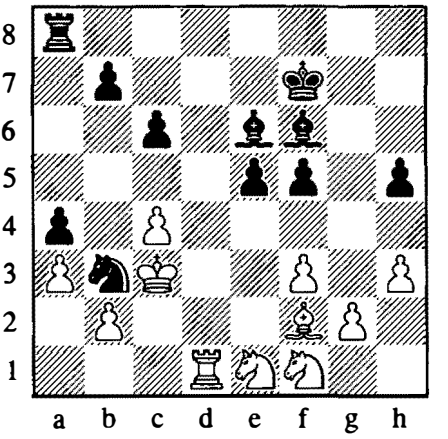
25.exf5

If 25.♘d2 f4 (or 25...♔f7!? keeping the central tension) 26.♗f2 g5∓ Black has the additional idea of ...g5-g4.

25...gxf5 26.♘c2

26.♗xc5 doesn't help: 26...♖xd1 27.♖xd1 ♗xc5 28.♘c2 ♔f7 29.♖e1 ♔f6 30.♘d2 h4∓ White's position is rather desperate.

26...♖xd1 27.♖xd1 ♔f7 28.♗f2 ♘b3 29.♘e1 ♗f6



White resigns. White is unable to hold the c4-pawn, and the entire game, say after 30.♔b4 b5! 31.cxb5 ♗e7† 32.♔c3 cxb5 followed by the deadly ...♖c8, or 30.♘d2 ♖d8 31.♔c2 ♗g5 32.♘f1 ♖xd1 33.♔xd1 ♗xc4.

0–1

Final remarks

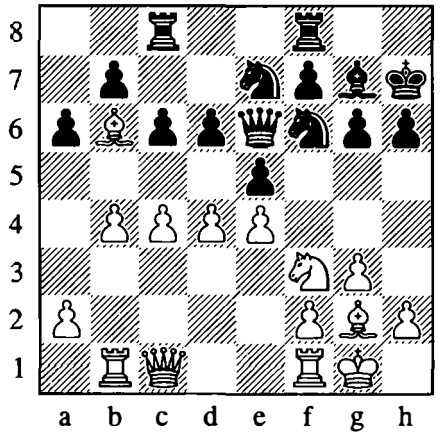
1. White's decision to trade with 8.dxe5 followed by 9.♕xd8 was reasonable, but not the most ambitious. He certainly could have obtained an equal position given more precise play, though it would have been difficult to play for an advantage.
2. The biggest problem for White was 12.a3 hoping for the impossible b2-b4. White should calculate this in advance, and if b2-b4 cannot be achieved, then a2-a3 should not be played.
3. Black's position became clearly more comfortable after ...a5-a4, as this move prevented White's queenside play and left the c4-pawn 'isolated' from the b-pawn and therefore vulnerable.
4. Black's decision to open up the game with 24...f5 proved very effective and it was a logical approach as White had given up the pair of bishops. This move allowed the game to be won very easily and convincingly.

Levan Pantsulaia – Mert Erdogdu

Turkey 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates the effectiveness of White's c4-c5 plan, and the subsequent space problem Black faces.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 d6 5.♘c3 0–0 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♖b1 e5 8.b4 a6 9.d3 h6 10.♗d2 ♗e6 11.♕c1 ♔h7 12.e4 ♘h5 13.♘d5 ♘e7 14.♗e3 c6 15.♗b6 ♕d7 16.♘c7 ♖ac8 17.♘xe6 ♕xe6 18.d4 ♘f6



Having started with the English Opening, this game has transposed into a King's Indian Complex structure. Once again, we have central tension and White can decide how to convert the position into a favourable King's Indian structure. His choice was:

19.dxe5!

An interesting alternative was 19.♖e1!? keeping the tension and preparing dxe5 on the next move, and now: 19...♘d7 (but not 19...exd4? 20.e5! dxe5 21.♘xe5 winning on the spot due to the threats ♘xg6 and ♘xc6) 20.♗a7 b5 21.dxe5 dxe5 22.♗e3± White has a favourable position thanks to the possibility of a future c4-c5.

19...dxe5 20.♕c2 ♘d7 21.♗e3 ♖cd8?

This is a serious positional blunder, as Black needed to play ...c6-c5 to hold the position. Now White will have a big advantage since c4-c5 is unpreventable.

It was necessary to play 21...c5! preventing c4-c5, though White stands better after 22.b5 (or 22.♖fd1!? cxb4 23.♖xb4±) 22...axb5 23.cxb5± followed by ♘d2-c4.

22.♖bd1

The most precise.

The slightly premature 22.c5?! is met by 22...f5 when Black is likely to gain counterplay, for example: 23.exf5 ♘xf5 24.♖fe1 ♘f6 25.♗f4 e4 26.♗g5! ♖de8 27.♗xf6 ♕xf6 28.♖xe4 ♖xe4 29.♕xe4 ♘d4! And after a relatively forced line we are heading for an endgame with good drawing chances.

22...♘c8

Now that White's rook is on d1, the attempt 22...f5 no longer works after 23.♗h3 ♕f7 24.♖d2! followed by ♖fd1 with strong pressure. For example: 24...fxe4 25.♕xe4 ♕xf3 26.♕xf3 ♖xf3 27.♖fd1 ♘f5 28.♗xf5 ♖xf5 29.♖xd7± With a far superior endgame.

23.♘d2

Preparing the transfer ♘c4-d6.

This was a good moment to play 23.c5± followed by ♘d2-c4-a5 (or ♘d6) attacking the b7-pawn.

23...♖fe8?!

Not the best option; now Black's pieces will be locked up.

Slightly better was 23...♘d6 so that after 24.c5 ♘b5 Black's knight is better than it was on c8, though after 25.♘c4 White preserves a big plus.

24.c5!±

White is nearly winning after this excellent transformation in the structure. This move

creates an outpost on d6 and gains queenside space. Note how Black's knight on c8 is simply out of the game.

24...♘f6

If 24...b5, covering the c4-square, then 25.cxb6 ♘cxb6 26.♖c1 ♖c8 27.♘c4 ♘xc4 28.♕xc4 ♕xc4 29.♖xc4± and the c6-pawn will fall sooner or later.

25.f3

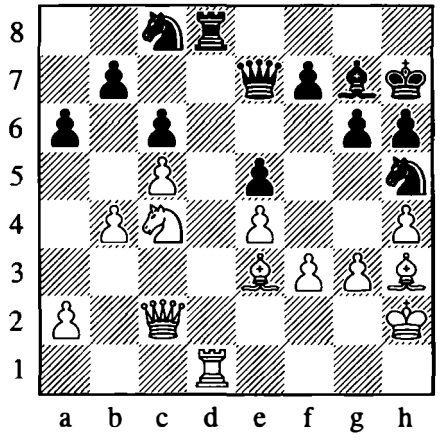
Covering the g4-square, preventing ...♘g4xe3 trading off pieces.

25...♖e7 26.♘c4 ♖ed7 27.♖xd7 ♖xd7 28.h4!

Threatening ♔h2 and ♗h3. Bringing the last piece into the game gives White a decisive advantage.

28...♖d8 29.♔h2 ♘h5 30.♗h3 ♕e7 31.♖d1!

A good decision, trading off the 'accessory pieces' in the position. Black's problem is the weakness of his queenside pawns, which White will capture soon.



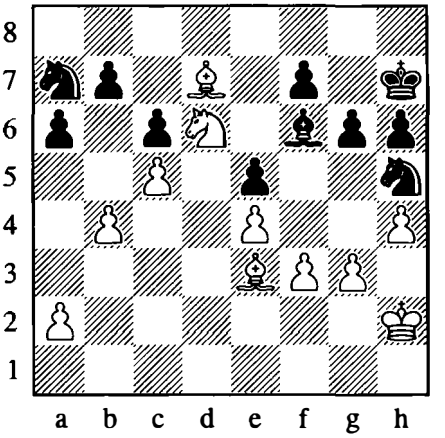
31...♗f6

If 31...♖xd1 32.♕xd1 ♕e8 and Black is losing on the spot after 33.♕d7! ♕xd7 34.♗xd7 ♘e7 35.♘d6.

32.♖xd8 ♕xd8 33.♕d2! ♕c7 34.♕d7

With queens off the board, the b7-pawn is defenceless.

34...♕xd7 35.♗xd7 ♘a7 36.♘d6



Black resigns as the b7-pawn and the game are lost.

1–0

Final remarks

1. The advance c4-c5 can be extremely strong and Black must prepare something very concrete against it. In this game, probably the only option was 21...c5 to prevent c4-c5 altogether. Other options to meet c4-c5 are to create a direct kingside attack, or to challenge White's c5-pawn with ...b7-b6. In this game the ...b7-b6 idea did not work well because Black's a-pawn was already on a6. So if White played c5xb6 then Black would have to recapture with a piece, leaving the c6-pawn isolated, as we saw in the note to 24...b5.
2. Once White achieved the c4-c5 advance a crucial element in the victory was bringing in pieces with ♔h2-h4-♗h3 and later simply trading off those pieces Black was using to keep his queenside protected. The weakness of the b7-pawn was enough to decide the game convincingly.

Mikhail Ulibin – Nukhim Rashkovsky

Russian Championship 2000

Learning objective: This game is an example of how Black obtains counterplay once White has achieved the c4-c5 advance. Here Black's idea is to play ...f7-f5 to create a double-edged position with attacking chances on the kingside.

1.e4 g6 2.d4 c6 3.c4 ♗g7 4.♘c3 d6 5.♗e2 ♘f6 6.♘f3 0–0 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.♗e3 e5

Although the game started out as a Modern Defence, we are now back in a very common King's Indian Complex.

9.♕c2

Keeping the central tension; this general-purpose move is mainly aimed to protect the e4-pawn in case Black takes on d4.

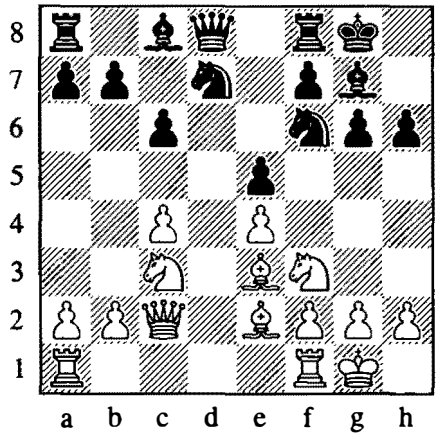
Another option was 9.d5 c5 and now 10.♘e1 ♘e8 11.♘d3 f5 12.f3 f4 13.♗f2 g5 14.b4 b6 15.♖b1 is a standard King's Indian Type II.

9...h6 10.dxe5

Releasing the tension.

Another option was the preparatory move 10.♖ad1 ♕e7 11.h3 with a small advantage for White.

10...dxe5



We have reached the first critical position in the game. How shall White proceed? As we learned in the previous game, it is crucial to keep control of the dark squares, and it would be ideal to achieve c4-c5 in order to gain an outpost on d6. My engine claims this position is a clear advantage for White, but after some analysis the solidity of Black's position becomes apparent. The game continued:

11.♕c1

A worthy alternative was to play c4-c5 right away with 11.b4 ♕e7 12.c5 (or 12.a3!?) and now White enjoys a small advantage after: 12...♘h5 (no better is 12...b6?! due to 13.♘a4! b5 14.♘c3 a5 15.a3 and now White has the additional idea of ♖d1-d6 attacking the c6-pawn) 13.♖fd1 ♘f4 14.♗f1 a5 15.a3±

11...♔h7 12.♘d2 ♘e8 13.b4

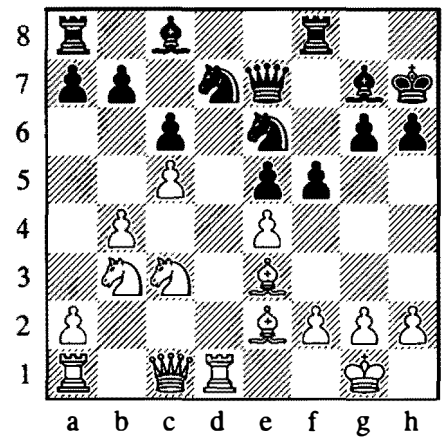
Now 13.c5 is a little too rushed, and can be met by 13...♘c7 14.♘c4 ♘e6 15.b4 ♘d4!? followed by ...b7-b6, when Black is just fine.

13...♘c7 14.♘b3 ♘e6 15.♖d1±

White enjoys a spatial advantage, but Black is not without counterplay after:

15...♕e7 16.c5 f5!

This reaction is necessary sooner or later, as Black needs to create a kingside attack in order to divert White's forces away from queenside play. After this break, Black's e5- and f5-pawns might become slightly vulnerable, but there is usually enough counterplay to compensate for this condition.



17.f3

If 17.exf5 gxf5 it is not clear where should White aim, for example 18.♗c4 ♘f6 19.f3 covering the g4-square, but now 19...e4!? yields a complicated position with mutual chances.

17...♘f6

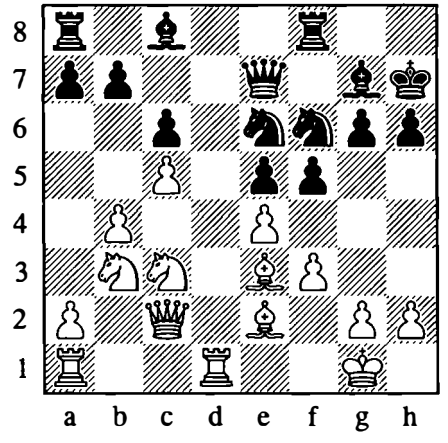
The alternative 17...f4 18.♗f2 g5 to carry out the typical kingside attack is double-edged, to say the least. The open d-file makes the attack much more difficult. For example, 19.♖d6 h5 20.♕c2 ♘f6 21.b5!? and White's attack seems likely to arrive faster.

An interesting alternative was 17...♘f4!? 18.♗f1 ♘f6 19.♘d2 h5 followed by ...♗h6 with good counterplay.

18.♕c2?!

Is White trying to 'play it safe'? This move allows Black to seize the initiative.

If 18.exf5 gxf5 19.♕c2 Black obtains a perfectly playable position after 19...♘g5 or 19...♘c7!?.



18...fxe4 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4

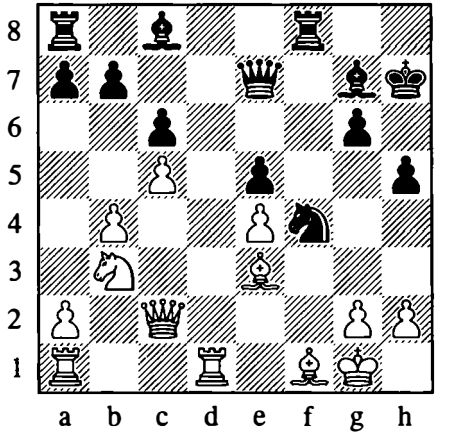
Even better was 19...♘f4! 20.♗f1 ♗f5 when it is White who must fight for equality.

20.fxe4

Instead 20.♕xe4? is met by 20...♘g5! 21.♗xg5 ♕xg5∓ with strong threats such as ...♖f4 and ...e4.

20...♘f4 21.♗f1 h5!∓

Of course! This move is very important as it allows Black to bring his dark-squared bishop into the game with ...♗h6, as well as play ...h5-h4-h3 creating threats against White's king. Note how White's queenside play has been stopped halfway and nothing has been achieved. The position is still close to equal, but Black's side is much easier to conduct.



22.♘a5 h4 23.a4 ♗g4

This bishop will be extremely powerful on g4, and White should find a way to get rid of it.

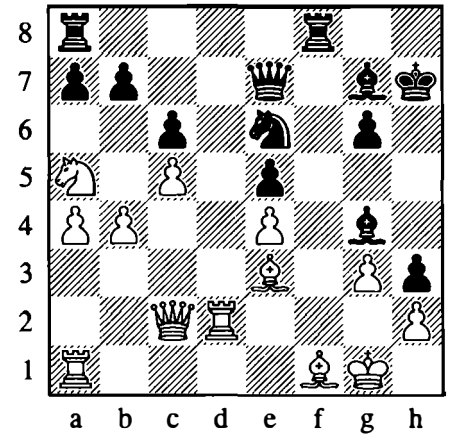
24.♖d2?!

24.♖d6 was better, establishing a firm block on the d-file, and now following the game's continuation 24...h3 25.g3 ♘e6 26.♘c4 ♘g5 27.♗xg5 ♕xg5, White seems to hold after 28.♗e2! though Black's position would be more pleasing to play over the board.

24...h3

This h3-pawn will be a nightmare for White for the rest of the game.

25.g3 ♘e6



26.♘c4 ♘g5 27.♗xg5 ♕xg5 28.♖f2?

Making things easier for Black.

Necessary was 28.♗e2! driving away Black's powerful bishop, but after: 28...♗xe2 (or 28...♗e6!?) 29.♖xe2 ♖ad8 30.♖d1 (30.♘d6 ♗h6!∓) 30...♖d4 31.♖f2 ♕d8! 32.♖ff1 b6!∓ White has back-rank problems and will have a weak pawn on the queenside.

28...♗h6∓

All of Black's pieces contribute to the attack.

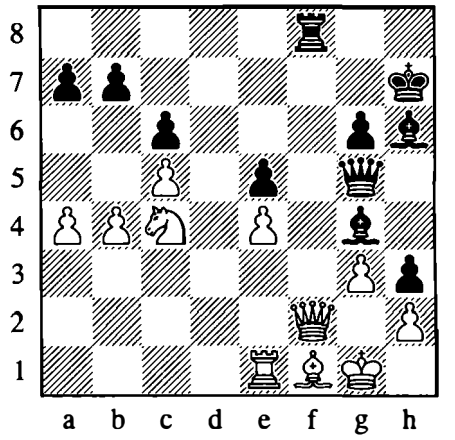
Somewhat stronger was 28...♖xf2! 29.♕xf2 ♖f8 30.♕e1 ♕d8 31.♘d6 b6 with a near winning position, which is similar to the game. The key is that White does not have time to play 32.♗e2 trading the powerful bishop on g4, due to 32...♗xe2 33.♕xe2 bxc5 34.bxc5 ♕a5 35.♕c2 ♗h6 and there is no defence against the threat of ...♗e3 winning the c5-pawn and the game.

29.♖e1?

The last mistake in an extremely delicate position.

More stubborn was 29.♖xf8 ♖xf8 30.♗e2! though after 30...♗e6! 31.♕c3 ♗xc4 32.♗xc4 ♕g4∓ White is in serious trouble due to the threat of ...♖f3.

29...♖xf2 30.♕xf2 ♖f8



Black is winning due his raging attack and the fact that White's pieces are tied to their defensive posts.

31.♕c2

If 31.♕b2 then White is running out of moves after 31...♕d8! and for example: 32.♗e2 (or 32.b5 cxb5 33.axb5 ♗g5! 34.b6 axb6 35.cxb6 ♗e7 with the deadly threat of ...♗c5) 32...♗xe2 33.♕xe2 ♕d4† 34.♘e3 (or 34.♔h1 ♖f2 and wins) 34...♖f7! White is in zugzwang, since 35.♔h1 loses to: 35...♕xe4† 36.♔g1 ♗xe3† 37.♕xe3 ♕g2#

31...♕f6

One threat is ...♗e6xc4 followed by ...♕f3 and ...♗e3.

Again 31...♕d8! 32.♕b2 a6 would have left White in the zugzwang mentioned above.

32.♗d3

Instead 32.♘d6? loses immediately to: 32...♗e3†! 33.♔h1 ♕xf1† 34.♖xf1 ♖xf1#

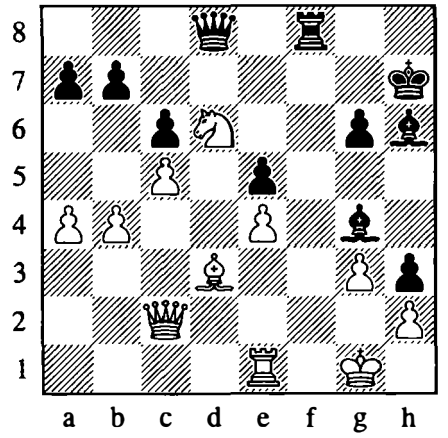
32...♕d8!

Threatening ...♕d4.

32...♗e6? is met by 33.♖f1 when White defends for longer.

33.♘d6

33.♕c3 is no use because 33...♖f3 34.♘d6 ♕f6 threatening ...♗e3, and now 35.♘c4 loses to: 35...♖xg3†! 36.hxg3 h2†! 37.♔h1 ♕f3† 38.♔xh2 ♕f2† 39.♔h1 ♗f3#



33...b6

Threatening 34...bxc5 35.bxc5 ♕a5!.

34.♕c3 bxc5

White resigns. After 35.bxc5 (or 35.♕xc5 ♖f6! wins a piece: 36.♕xa7† ♗g7) White is defenceless due to 35...♕f6 threatening ...♕f2: 36.♕c2 ♗d1! 37.♕b2 (or 37.♖xd1? ♗e3† 38.♔h1 ♕f3† 39.♕g2 hxg2#; or 37.♕xd1? ♕f2† 38.♔h1 ♕g2#) 37...♕f3 and White is losing on the spot due to the threat of ...♗e3.

0–1

Final remarks

1. Once White has achieved the c4-c5 advance, the kingside reaction ...f7-f5 is necessary. The resulting position is often complicated and risky for both sides, but Black does not have much of a choice if he wants to avoid a painful defeat, as we saw in the previous example.
2. White lost this game due to his lack of precision. In general his plans were correct, but he missed some key opportunities to stay in control, such as 18.exf5 which could have secured a small advantage in a complex position.

Ed. Iturrizaga Bonelli – Kiprian Berbatov

Pamplona 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates White's c4-c5 break against Black's centre.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.c4 ♗g7 4.g3 0–0 5.♗g2 d6 6.0–0 ♘bd7 7.♘c3 e5 8.e4 c6

We have reached the position of interest.

9.♗e3!?

This is a relatively rare but perfectly logical continuation.

Much more common is 9.h3 exd4 10.♘xd4 ♕b6 in the style of Chapter 17.

9...♘g4

Another option was 9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♖e8 11.h3 ♘c5 12.♕c2 ♕e7 13.♖fe1 a5 with a standard position.

10.♗g5 ♗f6?!

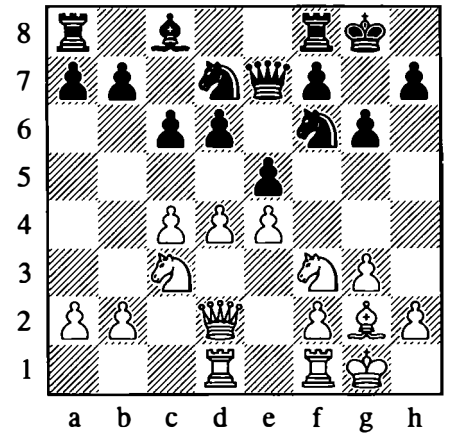
Black's decision to trade dark-squared bishops is premature, as the situation in the centre is not yet clear. The centre may transform into a variety of different positions, and Black's trade will only be beneficial in some of these. For example, based on the first game from this chapter we know White will *not* be interested in playing dxe5 after exchanging bishops, as the d4-square would become weak.

A better alternative was 10...f6 11.♗c1 ♘h6 (or 11...f5!?) 12.d5 c5 when we have transposed to the structure studied in Chapter 15.

Another common option is 10...♕b6!? 11.h3 exd4 12.♘a4 ♕a6 13.hxg4 b5 with complications.

11.♗xf6 ♘gxf6 12.♕d2 ♕e7 13.♖ad1±

An interesting alternative was 13.h3!?± as a prophylactic move against the possible ...♘b6 followed by ...♗g4.



This is a critical point in the game. Black will generally not benefit from taking with ...exd4, hence he must find a useful way to wait while White decides what he wants to do with the centre. The position is unpleasant for Black due to this uncertainty.

13...a6

A typical plan, intending to follow with ...b7-b5. Personally I find this plan very difficult to carry out, as White can often find a strong central reaction against it, as indeed happened in the game.

Another option was 13...♘b6 14.b3 ♗g4 finishing piece development, but after 15.♕e3 ♖ad8 16.♖d2 (but not 16.d5?! due to 16...c5 when Black gains chances of counterplay on the kingside, while the trading of dark-squared bishops no longer seems to be a problem) 16...♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♖fe8 18.♖fd1± and White preserves a small edge.

14.♖fe1 b5?

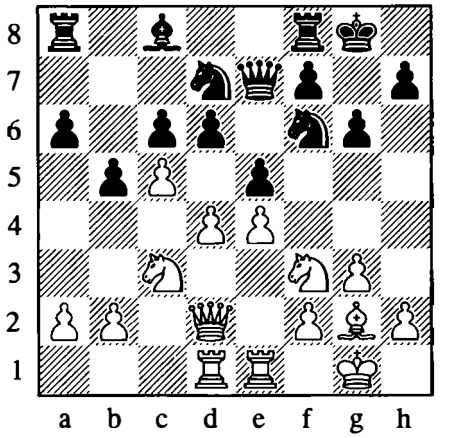
A consistent move, but wrong even so.

If 14...exd4 15.♘xd4± White has a highly favourable version of the previous chapter's structure. Black lacks his dark-squared bishop, which means his king is vulnerable and the d6-pawn is particularly weak.

It was better to hold the position with 14...♖e8 though White is better because he has more freedom regarding how to transform the position.

15.c5!±

Did Black expect this break? Possibly not. I must warn the reader that this idea is quite typical and Black should always carefully consider the consequences of this break. White will generally carry it out when his pieces are better prepared for the opening of the position, as occurs in the game. Black's problems are accentuated because of his lack of a dark-squared bishop.



15...dxc5 16.♘xe5?

This gives Black an additional defensive resource.

More precise was 16.dxe5 ♘xe5 (or 16...♘g4 17.♕d6 ♕e6 18.♘g5! ♕xe5 19.♕xc6 ♖a7 20.f4+–) 17.♘xe5 ♕xe5 18.f4± transposing to the game.

16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♕xe5?

Returning the favour.

A better defence was 17...♘e8 preventing White's bishop from attacking: 18.♕e3 ♖a7 19.f4 ♗g4± Black is holding for now.

18.f4 ♕e7?!

Keeping queens on the board will only benefit White.

Black should have headed into what is admittedly a much inferior endgame with 18...♕d4† 19.♕xd4 cxd4 20.♖xd4 ♗e6 21.♖d6± (or 21.e5!?) when Black's queenside pawns are very vulnerable.

Even worse is: 18...♕e8? 19.e5 ♘h5 20.♕d6+–

19.e5

White has achieved a fabulous position, as all his pieces play in harmony. Black's queenside pawns are falling.

19...♘d5

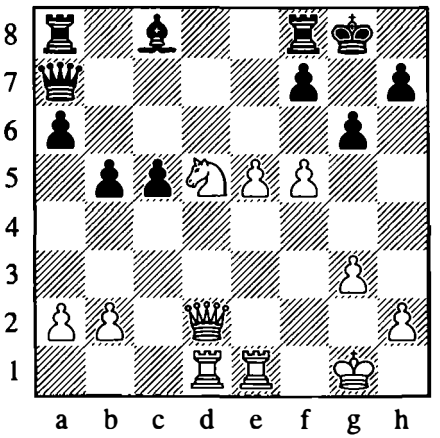
19...♘g4 is no better due to 20.♗xc6 ♖b8 21.♗f3! with winning threats associated with ♗xg4 and ♘d5-f6.

19...♘h5 20.♗xc6 ♖b8 21.♗f3 ♘g7 22.♘d5 ♕a7 23.♘f6† ♔h8 24.f5! with a decisive mating threat.

20.♗xd5 cxd5

Slightly more stubborn was 20...b4 21.♗xf7† ♖xf7 22.♘e4 ♗e6 23.♕c2 though Black's queenside pawns are falling.

21.♘xd5 ♕a7 22.f5!+–



Clearing the way for ♕h6 followed by ♘f6, when Black is suddenly getting mated.

22...c4†

The option 22...♗xf5 23.♕h6 ♔h8 24.g4! is similar to the game

23.♔f1

But not 23.♔g2? ♗b7 and Black is holding the game.

23...♗xf5 24.♕h6

Threatening ♘f6 and ♕xh7#.

24...♔h8 25.g4!

A nice move; the bishop cannot stay on the b1-h7 diagonal.

Another option was 25.♘f6!? g5 protecting h7, but now 26.♖d7! ♕b6 27.e6 with a winning attack.

25...♗c2

If 25...♗xg4? then simply 26.♘f6 wins.

26.♖e2 f6 27.♖xc2 fxe5† 28.♔g2

White is a piece up for no compensation.

1–0

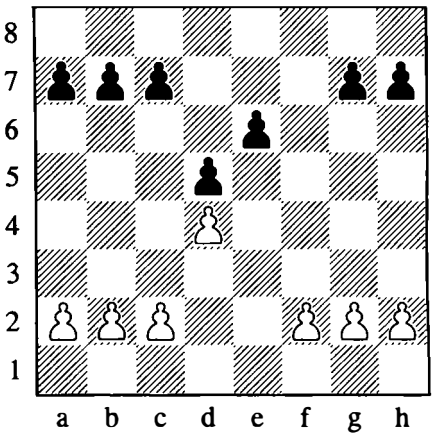
Black resigned rather than play out 28...♖ad8 29.♕g5 ♕g7 30.♖e2 e4 31.♕e3 ♖de8 32.♕d4.

Final remarks

1. Black's decision to trade dark-squared bishops was ill-conceived because the situation in the centre was not yet well determined.
2. White's c4-c5 break was an excellent decision, undermining Black's centre and opening lines of attack for the bishop on g2. If instead White had played d4-d5, then Black could have closed the centre with ...c6-c5 in which case the trading of dark-squared bishops would have been justified.
3. The strength of the c4-c5 break is enhanced if Black has already played ...b7-b5 as the c6-pawn becomes vulnerable. Nevertheless, the c4-c5 break can work well even if Black has not played ...b7-b5.

Chapter 19

French Type I



This structure often arises from the French and Caro-Kann defences, after Black challenges White's pawn chain with the typical ...f7-f6 break. The most important theme in this position is the control of the e5-square. If White is able to gain firm control of this square his position will generally be superior. For this reason Black must find counterplay rather quickly in order to avoid being dominated. Black's counterplay will usually be based on attacking White's d4-pawn. For this reason Black will typically play ...c5xd4 rather than ...c5-c4, which would release the tension on the d4-pawn, and thus allow White to have a solid centre. Specific plans are as follows.

White's plans

1. Control the e5-square and use it as an outpost for a knight, although a rook or bishop would also be powerful on this square.
2. Pressure the backward e6-pawn by doubling rooks on the e-file.
3. If White has already gained control of e5, then expand on the kingside, possibly with f2-f4 or h2-h4-h5 in order to create an attack.

Black's plans

All Black's plans are essentially based on preventing White from controlling the e5-square; they are:

1. Pressure the d4-pawn, play ...c7-c5xd4, ...♘c6 and sometimes ...♕b6.
2. Bring the light-squared bishop into the game with ...♗d7-e8-h5 (or g6). Since White typically has a knight on f3, a bishop on h5 would produce an unpleasant pin (against White's queen on d1) while also undermining the d4-pawn.
3. Double rooks on the f-file and possibly follow up with the exchange sacrifice ...♖xf3 capturing White's knight, undermining White's centre and kingside.
4. Achieve the central break ...e6-e5, to obtain an isolated and passed d-pawn.

As the reader may notice, this position is fairly one-dimensional. Everything revolves around the e5-square, and I believe the key for both sides is to know when it is a good idea to go into this position, and when it is not. The first game in this chapter will illustrate White's domination once he achieves control of the e5-square. Essentially all of his plans will be combined to yield a very convincing victory. The second example illustrates Black's exchange sacrifice with ...♖xf3 and the third example showcases Black's Plan 4 and the resulting position in which the isolated d-pawn is both a potential weakness and a potential threat because it is also a passed pawn.

This chapter is relatively short because the ideas presented in this structure are rather simple. In addition, the reason I only include one victory for White is because most of White's victories follow exactly the same path. I found many good examples, but they all communicate the same ideas over and over. What the reader must understand is: once White controls the e5-square he will have an excellent position and most of the plans listed above will be possible and strong.

Alexander Areshchenko – Yuri Vovk

Kiev 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White can dominate the game once he gains control of the e5-square.

1.e4 e6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.g3 ♘f6 5.♗g2 ♘c6 6.♘gf3 g6 7.0–0 ♗g7 8.c3 0–0 9.♖e1 ♖e8?!

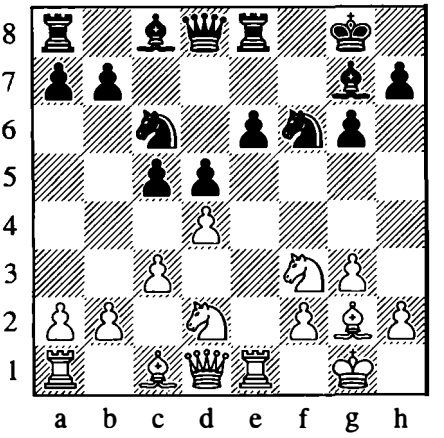
This move does not help Black; in fact in some variations the rook is better placed on f8.

A better move is 9...a5 getting a head start on the queenside. 10.e5 (or 10.a4!?) 10...♘d7 (or 10...♘g4!? which is included as an exercise) 11.d4 And now Black can play on the kingside with: 11...cxd4 (or play on the queenside with 11...b5 12.♘f1 b4 as in Chernobay – Grachev, Moscow 2012) 12.cxd4 f6!? It turns out the rook is more useful on f8! 13.exf6 ♕xf6 With level chances in Chernobay – Demidov, Moscow 2013.

10.e5 ♘d7 11.d4 f6 12.exf6 ♘xf6

Worse is 12...♕xf6 due to: 13.♘b3! c4 (Or if 13...cxd4?! then the strong 14.♘bxd4! threatens Black in many ways, such as ♘b5-c7. 14...♘xd4 15.cxd4± With a typical "dream position" for this structure.) 14.♘bd2 Followed by the standard plans ♘f1-e3-g4-e5, or ♗f4, or h2-h4-h5. White has a very comfortable position, as Black cannot even attempt to get the typical counterplay by attacking the d4-pawn.

12...♗xf6 13.♘f1± is very similar to the game.



We have reached the position of interest. The big question is: "Can White's pieces take possession of the e5-square?" The answer is "Yes" and for this reason White will simply be better. Black is already in serious difficulties.

13.h3

Preventing a potential ...♘g4, and getting ready to invade the e5-square.

It was possible to capture with 13.dxc5 but after 13...e5 Black gets some compensation for the pawn, as he has good control of the centre.

A slightly stronger alternative was 13.♘b3 threatening ♘xc5, forcing the c5-pawn to "state his intentions". 13...c4 (or 13...cxd4 14.♘bxd4 ♕b6 15.♖e2± followed by ♗f4 controlling the e5-square) 14.♘bd2± White has a comfortable advantage, as in the note above. The key is how well supported the d4-pawn is.

In the event of the immediate 13.♘e5?! Black solves his problems after: 13...cxd4 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.cxd4 e5! 16.dxe5 ♘g4 (this is what White wanted to prevent with 13.h3) 17.♘f3 ♘xe5 With an equal position.

13...b6

If 13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♕b6 creating direct pressure against the d4-pawn, then 15.♘b1!? redirecting the knight to c3. 15...♗d7 (or

15...♘e4 16.♘c3! ♘xd4 17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.♖xe4 ♘xf3† 19.♗xf3± with a superior pawn structure) 16.♘c3 ♖ac8 17.♖b1± Followed by ♗f4 controlling the e5-square.

14.♘e5 ♗b7

Now 14...♘xe5? is punished by: 15.dxe5! It is usually better to occupy the e5-square with a piece (the standard reply would be 15.♖xe5) but here there is a tactical justification: 15...♘d7 16.♘c4! This is the key. 16...♖b8 (but not 16...dxc4? 17.♗xa8+–) 17.♘d6 ♖f8 18.f4±

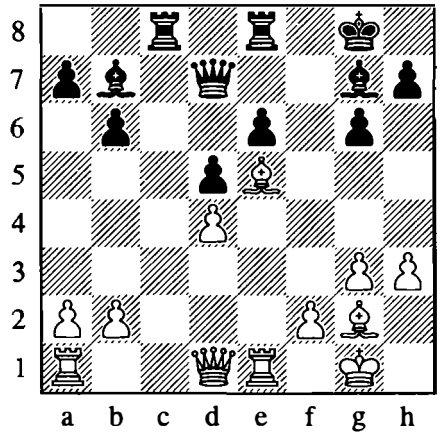
15.♘df3

Reinforcing the control of e5.

15...♘xe5

The alternative 15...♘e4 seems tempting, but 16.♘xc6 ♗xc6 17.♗f4± followed by ♘e5 gives comfortable control of e5.

16.♘xe5 ♘d7 17.♗f4 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖c8 19.♘xd7 ♕xd7 20.♗e5±



White has a clear advantage for the following reasons:

1. He has undisputed control of the e5-square.
2. The e6-pawn is a long-term weakness.
3. Black's light-squared bishop is blocked by his own pawns.
4. Black's kingside may become vulnerable after the typical h3-h4-h5.

20...♗h6

Preserving the dark-squared bishop, hoping for some counterplay, although Black does not have much to aim for anyway.

Let's see another approach:

20...♗xe5 21.♖xe5 ♕c7

Black intends to play ...♕c2.

Attempting a c-file invasion with 21..♖c7 is refuted by 22.♗f1 ♖ec8 23.♗d3± covering the c2-square. White's bishop is extremely powerful on d3, as it supports the idea h3-h4-h5 attacking the g6-pawn.

22.♕g4!

Attacking the e6-pawn.

22...♕f7

But not 22...♕c2?! due to 23.♖xe6 ♕xb2 24.♖ae1 with a fierce attack. For example: 24...♖f8 25.♖6e2 ♖c2 (or 25...♕b4 26.♖e7 and wins) 26.♖xc2 ♕xc2 27.♖e7 ♕xf2† 28.♔h1 With a crushing attack against Black's monarch.

23.♕e2±

Followed by ♖ae1 and h3-h4-h5, which is similar to the game.

21.h4

Another option was 21.♗f1!? relocating the bishop to d3. Then 21...♖f8 22.♗d3 ♕f7 23.♕e2± followed by h3-h4-h5 after the necessary preparation.

21...♕f7 22.♗h3

This is another good route for White's bishop, pressuring the e6-pawn.

22...♗c6 23.♕d3 ♗d7 24.♖e2 ♖c6 25.♖ae1

White's play is rather simple; he improves his position by exerting pressure on the e6-pawn.

Another option was 25.♔g2!? ♖ec8 26.♖h1 followed by ♗g4 and h4-h5, which is similar to the game.

25...a5

It is not advisable to play 25...♖ec8 due to 26.♕a6 threatening the a7-pawn. The point is

that after 26...♗e8? Black loses on the spot after the forcing line: 27.♗f4! (threatening ♗xe6 and ♗xh6) 27...♗xf4 28.♗xe6 ♖xe6 29.♕xc8 ♖xe2 30.♖xe2 ♔f8 31.gxf4

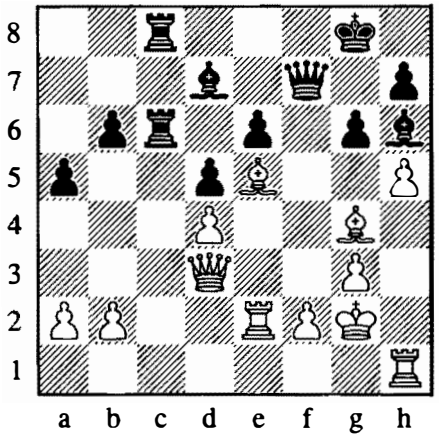
26.♔g2 ♖c4

There is nothing productive to do, hence Black begins to play waiting moves while White continues to make progress.

If 26...♖ec8 27.♗g4 ♖c1, intending to trade a pair of rooks to lessen Black's problems, then 28.♖xc1 ♖xc1 29.♖c2! ♖xc2 30.♕xc2 followed by ♕c7 invading Black's camp with a near-decisive advantage.

Even worse is 26...♖c1? due to: 27.♖xc1 ♗xc1 28.♖c2 ♗h6 29.♖c7+–

27.♗g4 ♖c6 28.♖h1 ♖ec8 29.h5



Finally we are there! Areshchenko obviously knows this kind of position, and he could already foresee his break back on move 13 when we arrived at this structure. Black's position is desperate due to the creation of new weaknesses. The most immediate threat is hxg6 winning the bishop on h6.

29...♗g7

It is impossible to keep lines closed with 29...g5 due to 30.f4! (or 30.♖e3!? followed by ♖f3 with a huge advantage) 30...gxf4 31.♖f1 ♕e7 32.♗xf4 ♗xf4 33.♖xf4 with a massive advantage due to Black's weaknesses and exposed king.

30.♗xg7 ♔xg7 31.♖e5

Not the strongest, but conceptually correct and certainly good enough.

A more direct, but rather complicated, win could be obtained after: 31.hxg6! hxg6 (or 31...♕xg6 32.♕a3! threatening ♕e7 or ♖e5-h5 with a devastating attack, for example: 32...♕xg4 33.♕e7† ♔g8 34.♕xh7† ♔f8 35.♕h8†! ♕g8 [35...♔e7? 36.♖h7† ♔d6 37.♕e5#] 36.♕f6† ♔e8 37.♖h8+–) 32.♕e3 ♕f6 (32...♖h8? loses a rook after 33.♕e5†) 33.♕h6† ♔f7 34.♖e3 Threatening ♖f3 with a crushing attack.

31...♖c2 32.♕e3 ♖f8

Threatening ...♕xf2.

Taking the pawn by 32...♖xb2? loses on the spot after: 33.hxg6 hxg6 (or 33...♕xg6 34.♖g5) 34.♕h6† ♔f6 35.♖e3 Threatening ♖f3, and now 35...♔e7 36.♖f3 ♕g8 37.♕g5† ♔d6 38.♖h6 when White's attack is irresistible.

33.♗f3 ♖xb2 34.hxg6 ♕xf3†

Going into a technically lost endgame, but there was nothing better to do.

If 34...hxg6 White gets a winning attack. For example, 35.♕h6† ♔f6 36.♖h4 ♔e7 37.♖f4 ♕g8 38.♕g5† ♔d6 39.♗xd5! and wins, since 39...exd5? fails to 40.♕e7† ♔c7 41.♖xf8.

35.♕xf3 ♖xf3 36.♔xf3 hxg6 37.♖e2 ♖b4 38.♖c2 ♗a4

Not 38...♖xd4? 39.♖c7 and White wins at once.

39.♖c7† ♔f6 40.♔e3

Note how the attack against Black's king continues; the threat is f2-f4, ♖hh7 and ♖f7#.

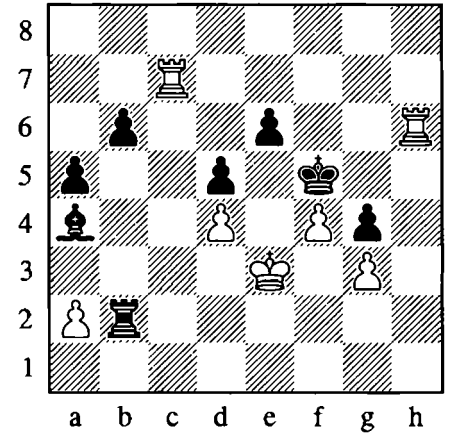
40...♖b2 41.♖hh7+–

Black cannot prevent mate in any sensible way.

41...g5

Or 41...♗e8 42.f4 ♔f5 43.♔f3 (threatening ♖f7) 43...♔f6 44.♖h8 ♗b5 (44...♗f7 45.♖f8+–) 45.♖f8#.

42.♖h6† ♔f5 43.f3 g4 44.f4



Black resigns due to the checkmating threat with ♖f7.

1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's biggest mistake was 11...f6 creating a weak e5-square he would not be able to guard later.
2. White's plans as exhibited in this game are extremely typical of this structure; they repeat themselves over and over.
3. White's break h4-h5 was essential in the victory as it forced the creation of a new weakness – the g6-pawn.
4. In retrospect, we realize that having a pawn on g6 should have been a red flag for Black, indicating his position would be bad after 11...f6. Had the pawn been on g7 it would have been harder for White to break on the kingside (e.g. h4-h5 would not hit anything yet).

Luka Paichadze – Baadur Jobava

Tbilisi 2012

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's counterplay based on the typical exchange sacrifice ...♖xf3.

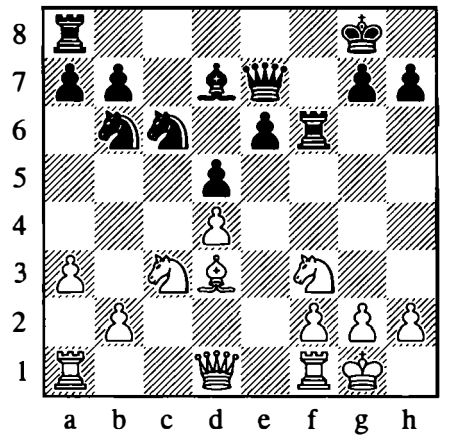
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 ♘c6 7.♗c4 ♘b6 8.♗d3 d5 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0–0 ♗d7 12.♘c3 0–0 13.a3 f5

Good timing! Black takes the opportunity to make this move, in order to prevent White's future expansion on the kingside with f2-f4-f5.

14.exf6

Better was 14.♘e2!? hoping to play h2-h4 and ♘f4 pressuring the e6-pawn: 14...♗e8 15.♘f4 ♗f7 16.h4± With somewhat better chances since the e6-pawn is vulnerable and Black's bad bishop is currently locked up.

14...♖xf6



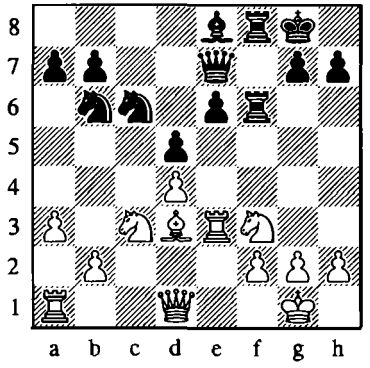
The reader should understand that Jobava played 13...f5 knowing he could secure enough counterplay to avoid being dominated as in the previous example. Unlike the previous game, White's d4-pawn is vulnerable, and Black's plans (...♗e8-h5 or ...♖af8) will only accentuate this problem. In fact, Jobava must have calculated

that White is not well prepared to prevent both of these plans.

15.♘e2?!

White probably chose this move in order to meet 15...♗e8 with 16.♘g3 preventing the annoying ...♗h5, but this move allows a strong continuation.

Instead if 15.♖e1 ♖af8 threatening ...♖xf3 (now 15..♗e8?! does not work well due to 16.♘e5!± since 16...♘xd4?! is met by 17.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 18.♕xd4±) 16.♖e3 and now: 16...♗e8!



Bringing the bishop into the game via h5 (or g6). It is Black who is fighting for the advantage since the pressure down the f-file has become far more important than the backward pawn on e6.

15...♖xf3!

A natural and strong decision. At the cost of an exchange, Black destroys White's pawn structure. The main targets are the f-pawns and the d4-pawn.

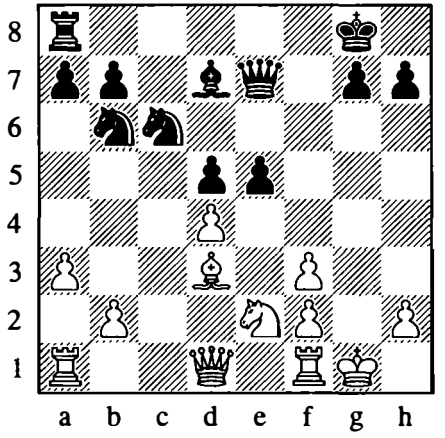
Another option was 15...e5!? 16.♘xe5 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♕xe5 and the resulting structure will be studied in the next example.

15...♗e8 would be well met by 16.♘g3 preventing the annoying ...♗h5.

16.gxf3 e5!

Planning ...♗h3 to turn the 'bad bishop' into a dangerous weapon. Black's position is not necessarily superior yet, but White's defence is very hard to conduct due to the multiple threats.

After the imprecise 16...♕g5†?! 17.♔h1 ♕h5 18.♘g3 ♕h4 19.♘e2 Black only gets a draw by repetition after 19...♕h5 (but 19...e5!? is also a worthy alternative; while 19...♘xd4?? loses to 20.♘xd4 ♕xd4 21.♗xh7†).



17.♖e1?

This is not the best defence, though White's position was quite difficult to play.

If 17.dxe5 ♘xe5 the knight becomes active: 18.♘g3 ♖f8 19.♗e2 ♕h4∓ With the unpleasant threats of ...♖f6-h6 and ...♘g6-f4 followed by ...♕h3.

Probably the best defence was the weird-looking 17.♗b5 with the intention to trade off the c6-knight before it becomes a threat. 17...♖f8 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19.♘g3 Chances are approximately balanced, but Black is really the one playing for an advantage. A possible continuation is 19...exd4 20.♕xd4 c5 21.♕d1 ♕g5 with excellent compensation, threatening ...h7-h5-h4.

17...♖f8

Even stronger was the more direct: 17...♕g5†! 18.♔h1 (or 18.♘g3?! ♘xd4 with a winning position due to the threats of ...h7-h5-h4

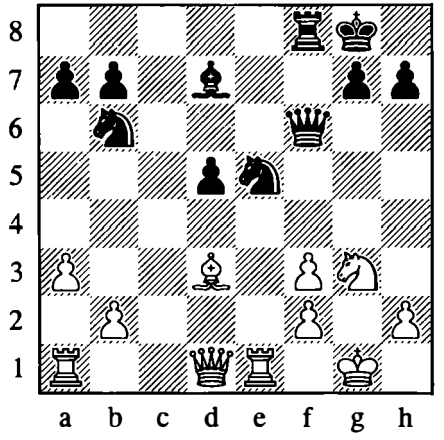
and ...♖f8) 18...♕f6! Threatening ...♕xf3 with check, to which there is no satisfactory answer. For example: 19.♘g3 (or 19.f4?! e4! 20.♗c2 ♗g4 followed by ..♗f3 with a decisive attack) 19...♘xd4 20.♖e3 ♖f8–+

18.♘g3 ♕f6

Threatening ...♘xd4.

Instead 18...♘xd4? fails tactically due to 19.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 20.♕xd4± thanks to the pin down the e-file.

19.dxe5 ♘xe5



20.♖xe5?!

A desperate decision made under pressure.

It was slightly better to keep the exchange with 20.♗e2 but after 20...♗c6! the threat of ...d5-d4 is strong. For example: 21.♕b3 To pin the d5-pawn. 21...♔h8 (21...♘bc4!? is a worthy alternative) And now there is nothing better than: 22.f4! (but not 22.♕e3? due to 22...d4!–+) 22...♕xf4 23.♕e3 Bringing the queen into the defence, and now 23...d4 24.♕xf4 ♖xf4∓ with a superior endgame due to the excellent piece coordination and the passed d-pawn.

20...♕xe5

Despite material equality, White's position is strategically lost since he has weaknesses all over the board, such as the pawns on b2, f3, f2, as well as his vulnerable king.

21.♕d2

Giving up a pawn to gain some time to reorganize his forces, but this will not really help.

If 21.♖b1, protecting the b2-pawn, then 21...♕f4 22.♗e2 ♗c6 threatening ...d5-d4, or ...♘c4-e5.

21...♖xf3

Black has an extra pawn, a superior structure and a safer king; the rest of the game is rather simple.

22.♗f1 ♖f8 23.♗g2 ♖e8 24.♖d1 ♗a4 25.f4 ♕f6 26.♖f1 ♗c6 27.f5 ♕e5

Threatening ...♕e3, trading queens into a winning endgame.

28.f6 gxf6

White cannot create serious threats.

29.♕d1

29.♕h6 doesn't help due to 29...♕g5.

29...♘c4 30.♘f5 ♘e3 31.♕h5 ♔h8 0–1

Final remarks

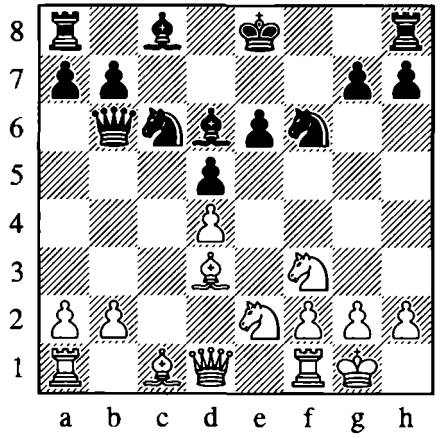
1. Black transferred into a French Type I structure under ideal conditions, as he had time to obtain counterplay along the f-file. White would have been better off playing 14.♘e2 instead.
2. Black's exchange sacrifice was fully justified. White's kingside was so badly damaged that it was impossible for him to become organized in order to make use of his extra rook.

Gregory Shahade – Varuzhan Akobian

Philadelphia 2012

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's ...e6-e5 break and how to conduct the resulting position.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.c3 c5 6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.♘e2 ♕b6 8.♘f3 cxd4 9.cxd4 f6 10.exf6 ♘xf6 11.0–0 ♗d6



12.b3

Everything is according to theory so far.

Another common alternative is 12.♘c3 0–0 13.♖e1 ♗d7 14.♗e3 when the b2-pawn is untouchable: 14...♕xb2? 15.♘a4! ♕a3 16.♗c1 ♕b4 17.♗d2 ♕a3 18.♖e3!+– Followed by ♗b1 capturing Black's queen.

12...e5?

This is certainly premature, though the idea is generally present and would deserve more consideration if Black's development were complete.

More common is 12...0–0 13.♗b2 ♗d7 14.♘g3 ♔h8 15.♖e1 ♖ae8 with roughly level chances.

13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♖b1?

Missing the chance to punish Black's 13th move.

Correct was:

15.♗e3! ♕d6

15...♕a5 16.♕e1! ♕xe1 17.♖axe1 0–0 18.♗d4±

16.♖c1

Gaining a crucial tempo, and threatening ♗c5 with a big advantage. Now the critical variation is:

16...♗xh2† 17.♔h1 ♗e5

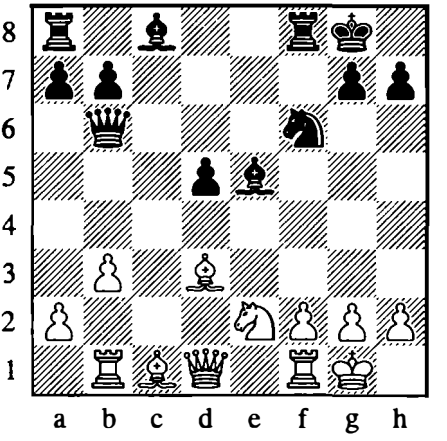
17...♘g4 18.♘d4! (threatening ♖xc8) 18...♘xe3 19.fxe3 ♗e5 20.♕h5†+–

18.♗c5 ♕c7 19.♘d4

White's attack is decisive, for example:

19...♔f7 20.f4! ♗xf4 21.♘b5 ♕b8 22.♕f3 ♗xc1 23.♕h5† g6 24.♖xf6†! ♔xf6 25.♕h4† ♗g5 26.♗d4† ♔f7 27.♕xg5+–

15...0–0



Despite previous mistakes, we reach an interesting and characteristic position for the French Type I structure. Black has an isolani, but unlike those examples we studied in Chapter 1, Black's d5-pawn is actually a *passed pawn*. Also unlike Chapter 1, trading pieces or placing a knight on d4 will not help White so much, as we will see in this game.

16.h3

The natural 16.♗e3 is refuted by: 16...♗xh2†! 17.♔xh2 ♘g4† 18.♔g3 (Even worse is 18.♔h1 ♕d6! when White's position is hopeless. For

example: 19.g3 ♘xe3 20.fxe3 ♕h6† 21.♔g1 ♕xe3† 22.♔g2 ♖xf1 23.♔xf1 ♗h3† 24.♔e1 ♖f8 with forced mate. Or 18.♔g1 ♘xe3 19.fxe3 ♕xe3† 20.♔h2 ♖xf1 21.♕xf1 ♕xd3∓) 18...♘xe3 19.fxe3 ♕xe3† 20.♖f3 ♕e5† 21.♔f2 ♗g4∓ With a promising attack.

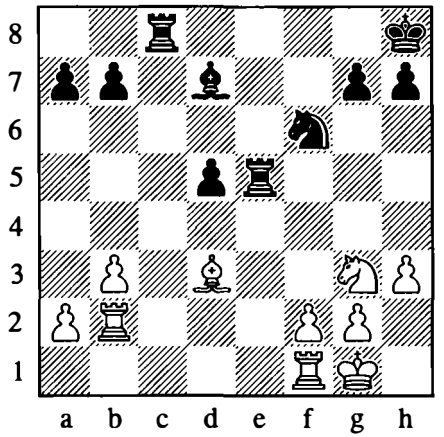
16...♗d7 17.♗f4

An option was 17.♗e3 ♕b4 (not 17...♕d6? 18.f4+–) 18.♕e1 ♕e7 19.♖d1 a6 20.♕d2 ♖ae8 when White has a tiny plus. It is not easy to take control of d4, as after 21.♗d4 ♗xd4 (or 21...♗c7!?) 22.♘xd4 ♘h5 23.♖fe1 ♕f6 Black gains counterplay with ...♘f4.

17...♖ae8 18.♕d2

Taking control of d4 with 18.♗xe5 ♖xe5 19.♘d4? does not work at all, since White's centre is built on sand, and after 19...♘h5! (but not 19...♕xd4?? 20.♗xh7†!+–) his position quickly collapses: 20.♕d2 (or 20.♘f3 ♖e7∓ followed by ...♘f4, ...♕f6 with serious threats) 20...♘f4 21.♗c2 (or 21.♖fe1 ♖g5–+) 21...♕xd4!–+

18...♔h8 19.♗xe5 ♖xe5 20.♘g3 ♕d4 21.♕b2 ♕xb2 22.♖xb2 ♖c8

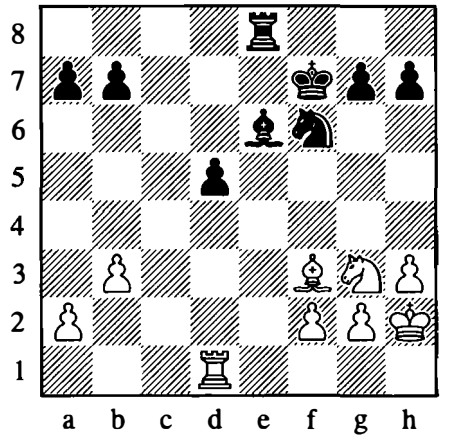


Some pieces are off the board, but White has nothing special since the d5-pawn is both a potential weakness and a potential threat.

23.♖d1

Slightly preferable was 23.♖e2 ♖xe2 24.♘xe2 covering d4, and after 24...♔g8 25.f3 ♔f7 26.♔f2 ♔e6 27.♔e3 ♔d6 28.♔d4 g6 29.♘c3 a6 White has a tiny plus, though Black can gain counterplay with ...♗e6 and ...♘g8-e7-c6, lifting the blockade of his passed pawn.

23...♔g8 24.♖bd2 ♔f7 25.♗e2 ♖ce8 26.♗f3 ♖e1† 27.♔h2 ♖xd1 28.♖xd1 ♗e6



Now a pair of rooks is off the board. If this was the typical isolani we studied in Chapter 1, White would have a big advantage in the spirit of the game Wojtaszek – Fressinet. However, in this position Black's isolated and passed pawn is actually becoming more of a threat, and White must play precisely to stay in the game.

29.♘f1

The alternative 29.♘e2 ♔e7 30.♘d4 ♗d7 is similar to the game, and of course trading rooks with 31.♖e1†?! ♔d6 32.♖xe8? ♘xe8 can only favour Black. For example, 33.♘e2 ♘f6 34.♔g1 ♔c5 35.a3 ♗b5!? 36.♔f1 ♗xe2† 37.♔xe2 ♔d4 when the passed d5-pawn and superior king should give Black the win.

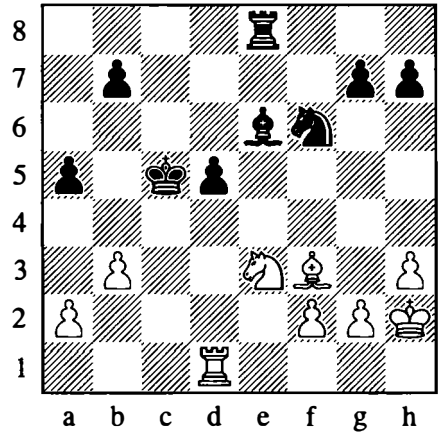
29...♔e7 30.♘e3 ♔d6 31.♘c4†?!

There is no point to this move.

It was better to activate the king with 31.♔g1 ♔c5 32.♔f1 a5 33.♘c2 b5 34.♘d4 ♗d7 though only Black can play for a win.

31...♔c5 32.♘e3 a5!∓

Gaining space on the queenside, speculating with the threat ...♔b4-a3 to create a queenside passed pawn.



33.♖c1†

An option was 33.a3 b5 34.♘c2 ♘e4 35.♖d4 but after 35...♘c3 (threatening ...♗f5) 36.b4† axb4 37.axb4† ♔d6 38.♖d3 ♖c8∓ Black stays in control.

33...♔d6

33...♔b4?! is premature due to 34.♖c7! since 34...b5?? allows the surprising 35.♘c2#. Instead 34...♔a3 35.♖xb7 ♔xa2 is about equal.

34.♔g1

Or 34.♖d1 b5 is similar to the game.

34...b5

The premature 34...d4? loses a pawn to 35.♘c4† ♗xc4 36.♖xc4.

35.♔f1 ♖c8!

Trading rooks will allow Black to advance his passed pawn.

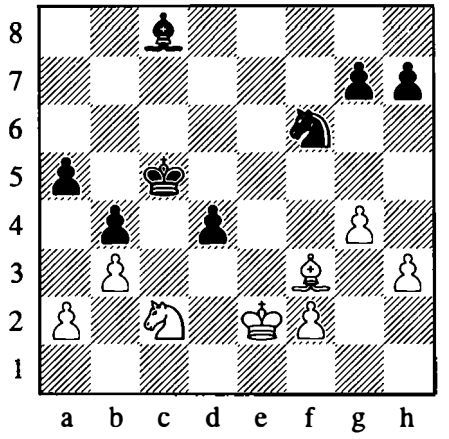
36.♖xc8 ♗xc8 37.g4?

An unnecessary weakening move.

Better was 37.♔e2 ♔c5 38.♔d2 b4 39.h4 ♗e6 40.g3 placing pawns on the opposite colour to one's bishop. White is worse, but has chances of holding a draw.

37...d4 38.♘c2 ♔c5 39.♔e2 b4!∓

Now, in addition to the passed pawn, White must worry about having his pawns on the colour of his opponent's bishop.



40.♔d2

The option 40.♘e1 ♗a6† 41.♔d2 h6 42.h4 ♘d5!∓ is similar to the game, while 41.♘d3† ♗xd3† 42.♔xd3 g5! leads to a lost endgame after: 43.♗e4 ♘d5! (but not 43...h6? 44.f4!=) 44.♗xh7 ♘f4† 45.♔d2 ♘xh3

40...g5?!

Conceptually correct, fixing White's kingside pawns on light squares. However, this is tactically inaccurate as we will see on move 43.

More precise was 40...♘d5! 41.♘e1 (or 41.♗xd5 ♔xd5 42.♘e1 g5→ is similar to the game) 41...♘c3 42.♘d3† ♔d6 43.♘b2 ♗a6 winning the a2-pawn and later the game.

41.♘e1 ♗a6?!

Conceptually correct, but imprecise again.

Better was 41...♗e6! keeping the advantage, since the line 42.♗g2 ♘d5 43.♗xd5 ♗xd5 44.f4 gxf4 45.♘d3† ♔d6 46.♘xf4 ♗e4 favours Black greatly, because after 47.♘d3 ♗xd3 48.♔xd3 ♔e5 the pawn endgame is winning for Black.

42.♗g2 h6

If 42...♘d5 43.♗xd5 ♔xd5 44.♘f3 h6 45.h4! White is just in time, and after 45...♗c8 46.hxg5 hxg5 47.♘xg5 ♗xg4 48.f4 ♗f5∓ Black's winning chances are minute.

43.♔d1?

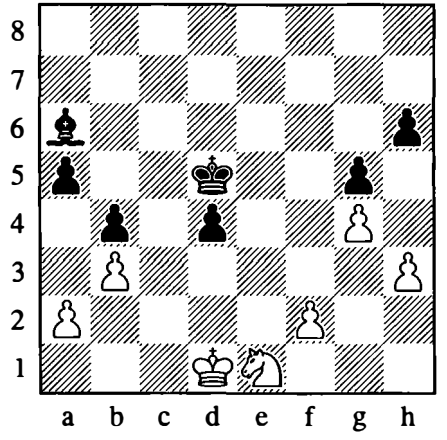
A fatal waiting move, allowing Black to consolidate his advantage.

White could have saved the game with 43.f4! getting rid of the weakness, and after: 43...gxf4 44.♘d3† ♔d6 (or 44...♗xd3 45.♔xd3 and it is Black who must be precise now, for example 45...♘d7?! 46.♔e4!±) 45.♘xf4 The endgame is drawn.

43...♘d5!–+

The threats 44...♘c3 and 44...♘f4 force White to trade his light-squared bishop.

44.♗xd5 ♔xd5



White's pawns on light squares are easy targets for Black's bishop. The battle is decided and the rest is simple.

45.♘f3

If 45.f3 then 45...♔e5 46.♔d2 ♗b5! is the most precise, leaving White in zugzwang (but not 46...♗f1 47.♘c2 ♗xh3? 48.♔e2 when the bishop is trapped). 47.♘c2 ♗f1 48.♘e1 ♔f4 49.♘c2 ♔xf3 50.♘xd4† ♔f4 51.♘f5 ♗xh3 52.♘xh6 ♗xg4–+

45...♔e4 46.♘e1

Black is also winning after 46.♘d2† ♔d3 47.♘f1 ♗b7 48.♘g3 (or 48.♘d2 ♗g2) 48...♗f3† 49.♔c1 ♔c3 followed by ...d4-d3-d2.

46...♗f1 47.♔d2 d3 48.f3†

Or 48.♔d1 ♗xh3 49.♔d2 ♗xg4 50.♘xd3 h5 and the h-pawn decides the game.

48...♔f4 49.♘xd3†

49.♔c1 doesn't help: 49...♔e3 50.♔d1 ♗e2† 51.♔c1 d2†–+

49...♗xd3 50.♔xd3 ♔xf3

The pawn endgame is winning for Black.

51.♔c4 ♔g3 52.♔b5 ♔xh3 53.♔xa5 ♔xg4 54.♔xb4 h5

White resigns. After the line 55.a4 h4 56.a5 h3 57.a6 h2 58.a7 h1=♕ Black's queen covers the promotion square.

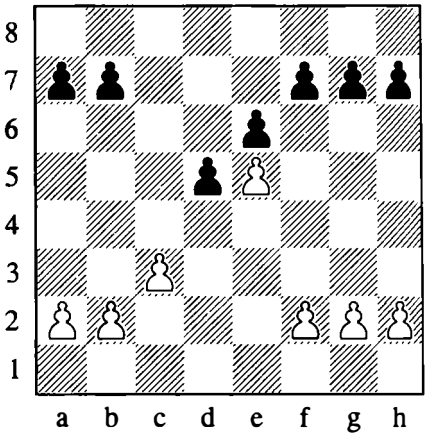
0–1

Final remarks

1. Throughout the entire game, White was unable to install a firm blockade against Black's d5-pawn. In fact, this isolated pawn was never vulnerable.
2. Trading pieces did not favour White; in fact towards the end, the trade of rooks allowed Black to obtain a winning endgame as the d-pawn advanced decisively.

Chapter 20

French Type II



This structure primarily arises from the French Defence, especially from versions of the line 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 cxd4 8.♘xd4. Another common way to obtain this structure is from a typical Sicilian Scheveningen structure (mentioned in Chapter 22), in which Black manages to get in the ...d6-d5 break and White replies with e4-e5.

This position is a mirror image of the King's Indian Type III-B studied in Chapter 16, but the character of the game is not quite the same because of the position of the kings (which typically castle short). In this structure White has chances for a mating attack, which he did not have in the structure mentioned above. Despite this difference, other ideas remain the same. For example, White desires to have firm control of d4 and to place a knight on this square (like the e4-square from Chapter 16). Also, the chain reaction f4-f5 (by analogy with c4-c5 in the structure in Chapter 16) is still strong. The plans for this structure are:

White's plans

1. Control the d4-square, place a knight on d4 and support it with c2-c3, a bishop on e3 and possibly a rook on d1.
2. Attack the base of Black's chain with f4-f5xe6 to later target the e6-pawn.
3. Obtain a kingside attack with f4-f5-f6 together with bringing pieces to the kingside such as ♕h5, ♖f3-h3, ♗d3.
4. Castle long and then pursue a kingside pawn storm with h2-h4-h5, g2-g4-g5, etc.

Black's plans

1. Undermine White's pawn chain with the central break ...f7-f6. This is generally an effective way to draw attention away from White's kingside attack.
2. Undermine White's e5-pawn with ...g7-g5, even as a pawn sacrifice.
3. Simplify the position to decrease the influence of White's spatial advantage and the power of White's attack.
4. Trade the bad bishop (the light-squared bishop) or find a way to place it outside the pawn chain, preferably on the b1-h7 diagonal.
5. Pursue a queenside minority attack with ...b7-b5-b4. This plan can be a positional idea to create weaknesses when White castles short, or can be used as an attacking plan if White has castled long.

The first game in this chapter is an example of White's kingside attack, while the second illustrates how Black can neutralize this action with his Plan 1 (the ...f7-f6 break). The third example illustrates how bad it can be to have a bad bishop (with reversed colours), while the

fourth example showcases Black's strong light-squared bishop on g6, combined with Plan 4. The fifth game in this chapter is an example of opposite-flank attacks once White castles long. This chapter finishes with two short examples. The first of these illustrates Black's Plans 2 and 3 combined, while the last example shows how Black may trade light-squared bishops.

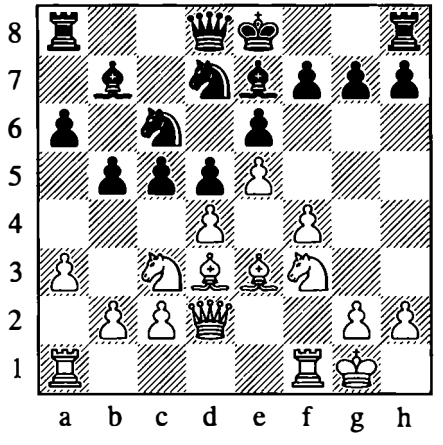
As the reader may notice, whether White castles short or long has an important effect on the nature of the game. Both options are very common, but six out of my seven examples have White castling short for pedagogical reasons. The positions resulting from long castling tend to be very sharp, and tactical complications often dominate over strategic ideas. It is good to know these games with long castling, but one is unlikely to learn strategy from them. For this reason I thought one example should satisfy the curiosity of the readers while giving me the opportunity to show at least some tactical ideas in this position.

Sergei Zhigalko – Alexander Rakhmanov

Moscow 2011

Learning objective: This game is an example of White's f4-f5 break and the resulting kingside attack.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 a6 8.♕d2 b5 9.a3 ♗b7 10.♗d3 ♗e7 11.0–0



Both players have closely followed the theory, and at this point we begin the middlegame phase.

11...♕c7

Advisable was 11...0–0 12.♕f2 f6! disputing White's central control as in the game Gao – Gomez, Mashhad 2011.

12.dxc5

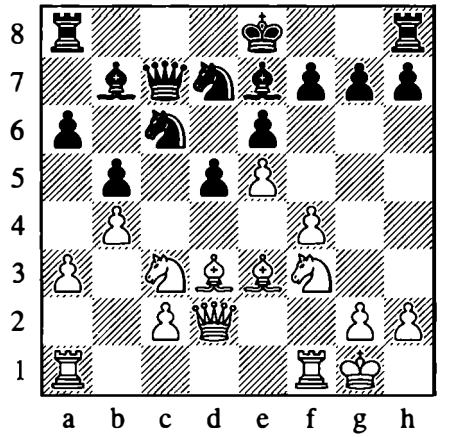
Another typical move is 12.♕f2!? forcing Black to define the centre with 12...cxd4 (or 12...c4!?) 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 0–0 15.b4!?± which is similar to the game.

12...♘xc5 13.b4!

This is a good positional decision, driving the knight away and fixing the queenside structure on a6 and b5. In some cases pushing b2-b4 could be weakening, especially to the c2-pawn, but here there is nothing to worry about, as White's position is rock solid.

13...♘d7

If 13...♘xd3 14.cxd3 0–0 15.♖ac1 ♖fc8 16.♕f2± White has good control of the dark squares, while the bad bishop on b7 is *really bad.*



14.♘e2

A natural move, heading towards d4, but probably not the most precise.

Black experiences some difficulties after 14.♕f2! planning to proceed with ♘e2 and ♘ed4 and

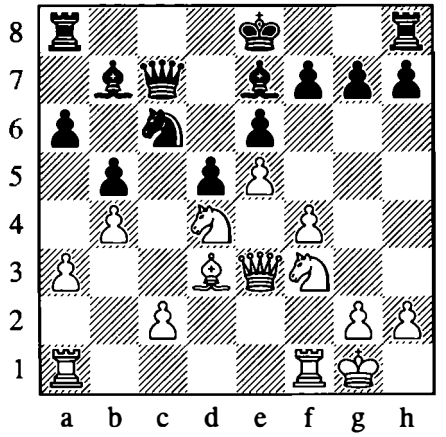
then a kingside attack, but having first prevented the manoeuvre ...♘b6-c4. Now a possible reaction is: 14...f6!? (the tempting 14...♘xb4? 15.axb4 ♕xc3 fails due to 16.f5!± when White obtains a strong attack; while 14...0–0 15.♘e2± is similar to the game) 15.♘d4 ♘xd4 16.♗xd4 0–0 17.♕h4 (17.♕e3!?±) 17...g6 18.♕h3! f5 19.g4!?±

14...♘b6 15.♘ed4 ♘c4 16.♕e1 ♘xe3?

This is a very poor decision in my opinion. Black clarifies the situation in the centre and gives White a free hand to carry out a kingside attack with f4-f5.

The right continuation was 16...0–0 17.g4 ♘xd4 18.♗xd4 a5 when Black has good queenside counterplay since 19.f5 is met by 19...exf5 20.gxf5 f6! with an unclear position.

17.♕xe3



This is a good moment to assess the position. White is better for the following reasons:

1. He has undisputed control of the d4-square.
2. Black's bad bishop is completely locked in by his pawns.
3. White may create a kingside attack, while Black cannot advance on the queenside.
4. The pressure on e6 prevents Black from one of his typical plans – the break ...f7-f6.

17...g6 18.c3

Launching an attack with 18.g4 is a little premature due to 18...h5! 19.h3 ♘xd4 20.♘xd4 hxg4 21.hxg4 ♖h4 with an unclear position.

18...0–0?!

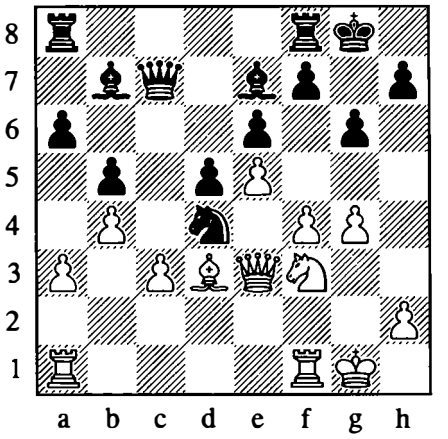
Black is basically inviting White to begin his kingside attack, as he has probably underestimated how strong it will actually be.

It was probably better to play 18...h5!? delaying the kingside attack, but now White can direct his attention to the queenside with 19.a4± or play 19.g3!? to slowly build a kingside attack after h2-h3, g3-g4, etc.

19.g4

Everything is ready to continue with f4-f5.

19...♘xd4



20.♘xd4?

This move is conceptually correct, as the knight and rook support the break f4-f5. Unfortunately, it misses a stronger continuation, and allows a strong reply, as we shall see.

Stronger was 20.cxd4! when Black has nothing better than 20...f5 to prevent f4-f5 (if 20...♖fc8 21.f5 ♕c3 22.h4! White gains a crushing attack, for example 22...♗f8 23.fxe6 fxe6 24.h5 ♗h6 25.♕xh6 ♕xd3 26.hxg6 ♕xg6 27.♕xg6† hxg6

28.♘g5) but after 21.exf6 ♖xf6 22.♘e5± White has a stable positional advantage, which is similar to the game Areshchenko – Vovk from the previous chapter.

20...♕b6?

The decisive mistake.

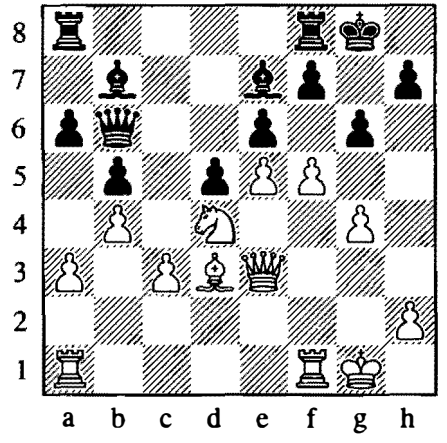
20...♔h8 would have allowed Black to meet 21.f5 with the strong 21...gxf5 22.gxf5 ♗g5! with a rather unclear position.

But instead, after 20...♔h8 White has the simple 21.♖ac1 protecting the c3-pawn and preparing an attack with h2-h4-h5. Black does not have much to do, for example 21...♖ac8 22.h4 ♖fe8 (22...♗xh4? 23.g5+–) 23.h5 ♗f8 24.♔g2 ♗g7 25.♖h1± with a crushing attack.

It was necessary to divert the attention away from the kingside attack with 20...♕xc3! and now after: 21.♖ac1 (or the unclear 21.♔h1!? followed by f4-f5 to insist on a kingside attack; but not 21.f5? due to 21...♗g5! winning a piece) 21...♕xa3 22.♖c7 Winning a piece for three pawns. 22...♗xb4 23.♘c2 ♕a5 24.♖xb7 ♗d2!? The position is rather unclear, but White retains a plus due to his attacking prospects.

21.f5!

White achieves the typical f4-f5 break with a crushing attack.



21...exf5

21...♖fc8 doesn't help because of: 22.fxg6 fxg6 23.♗xg6! This might be what Black missed. 23...hxg6 24.♕h6 White is winning after the forcing line 24...♖xc3 25.♕xg6† ♔h8 26.♕h5† ♔g8 27.♕f7† ♔h8 28.♖ad1! followed by ♕xe7 or ♕h5 and ♖f7.

22.gxf5 gxf5 23.♔h1 ♔h8

White is also winning after 23...♗c8 24.♗xf5 ♗xf5 25.♖xf5 ♔h8 26.e6! f6 (or 26...fxe6 27.♕e5†) 27.♖h5 with forced mate. For example: 27...♖g8 28.♖xh7†! ♔xh7 29.♕h3† ♔g7 30.♖g1† ♔f8 31.♕h6† ♔e8 32.♖xg8† ♗f8 33.♕xf8#

24.♖xf5 f6 25.e6 ♖g8 26.♖h5

Black resigns due to the imminent checkmate.

1–0

Final remarks

1. Although White's move 13.b4 seems like a positional mistake (it creates a weak c4-square, and turns c2 into a backward pawn) this move is thematic in this position and it works well to cover the c5-square and fix Black's queenside structure. This prevents Black from playing ...b5-b4 and ...a6-a5, thus keeping Black's bishop on b7 locked out of the game.
2. Black's biggest mistake was 16...♘xe3 which allowed White some extra support for his e5-pawn, to later push f4-f5 optimally.
3. The reader should remember Black's reaction ...exf5 followed by ...f6! to stop White's attack in the note 16...0–0.
4. Once White achieves the f4-f5 break under optimal conditions, there is essentially nothing Black can do to prevent a deadly mating attack. A reason for White's success in this game was his control of the d4-square and Black's inability to use his bishop on b7. In practical terms, White had an extra piece for the attack, and thus it comes as no surprise that his attack was a success.

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

Wijk aan Zee 2010

Learning objective: This game is an example of Black's ...f7-f6 break. Note how White's attacking chances die out after it.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♕d2 0–0 9.♗e2 a6 10.0–0 b5

So far both players have been following the theory, and now Karjakin goes into a low-scoring sideline:

11.♔h1

A more common line is 11.a3 ♕b6 12.♘d1 a5 13.c3 (or 13.♘f2 ♗a6 14.c3 b4 when Black manages to trade light-squared bishops) 13...a4 with level chances. White can carry out a typical kingside attack, while Black can play with ...♘a5-b3 or ...b5-b4.

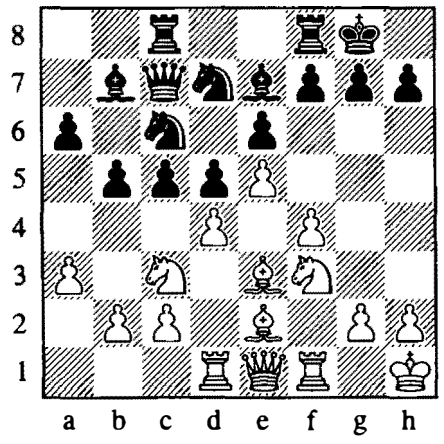
11...♕c7

We are already out of theory and the position is balanced.

12.a3 ♗b7 13.♖ad1 ♖ac8 14.♕e1

Intending ♕g3 (or ♕h4 if possible) to direct an attack against Black's king. I personally would not recommend this here since White does not have firm control of the centre yet.

Another option was 14.dxc5!? ♘xc5 15.♕e1 followed by ♕f2, heading for a positional fight.



14...cxd4

Of course, White is preparing a flank attack, therefore Black reacts in the centre.

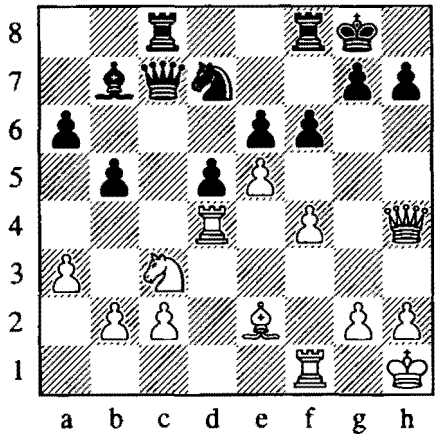
15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.♗xd4 ♗c5 17.♕h4?

This is overly optimistic; now White's centre will suffer.

It was not too late to accept the mistake and settle for an equal position with 17.♕d2 ♗xd4 18.♕xd4 and then 18...♕c5 or 18...f6!?.

17...♗xd4 18.♖xd4 f6!

A timely reaction; White's kingside plans suddenly come to a stop and White's centre becomes rather fragile.



19.♗d3?!

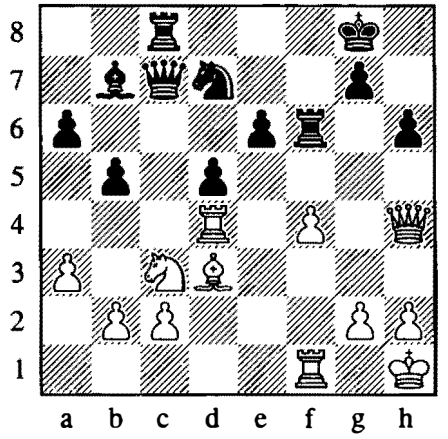
This move only aggravates White's problems, as the rook is awkwardly trapped on d4.

Better was 19.exf6 ♖xf6 20.♕e1 ♖cf8 although Black is better since the f4-pawn is much weaker than the e6-pawn, and the bishop on b7 is coming into the game soon, for example: 21.♗g4 ♕b6 22.♖d1 d4∓

19...h6 20.exf6

If 20.♕g4 ♘c5! (but not 20...f5? relieving the central tension, and solving White's problems) there is nothing better than 21.exf6 ♖xf6∓ which is similar to the game.

20...♖xf6∓



A very important moment in the game. Black has found a good time to break the pawn chain with ...f7-f6, and the f4-pawn has become a serious weakness. From a static perspective, White's pawn structure is superior; in fact Black has many weaknesses. However, White does not have the time or the pieces to take advantage of those weaknesses, and the threat of ...e6-e5 is very strong. White's pieces lack coordination and there is not even time to attack the typically weak e6-pawn.

21.f5

Attempting to get away from the trouble through tactical means, but Black is better prepared for these complications.

If 21.♕e1 ♖cf8 22.g3? hoping to hold the position, then 22...♕c5 taking advantage of the awkwardly-placed rook. 23.♖b4 e5!–+ And White's centre collapses. Notice the crucial role Black's 'bad' bishop plays in this attack.

21...♖cf8 22.♖g1

There is nothing better.

Instead 22.♖e1 ♘c5 23.fxe6? loses to: 23...♘xd3 24.♖xd3 ♖f1† 25.♖xf1 ♖xf1#

22...♘c5!

Threatening ...♘xd3 and ...♖xf5 winning.

23.fxe6 ♘xe6 24.♖g4?

The rook is very awkwardly located on g4.

Better was 24.♘xd5 but Carlsen was ready to reply 24...♗xd5 25.♖xd5 ♘f4 26.♖d4 ♕c5! and White must give up the exchange with 27.♖xf4 (since 27.♖e4?? loses on the spot due to 27...♘xd3 28.cxd3 ♕xg1†! 29.♔xg1 ♖f1#) 27...♖xf4∓ when White has meagre drawing chances.

24...♘f4

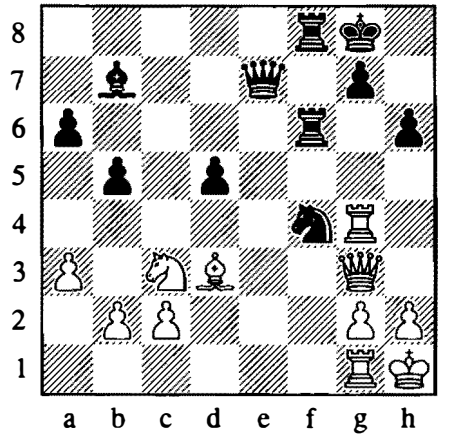
Black is essentially winning already, due to his activity and the threat of ...d5-d4 bringing the bishop decisively into the game.

25.♕g3

25.♘e2 doesn't help due to 25...♘xd3 26.cxd3 ♕e7! with a winning attack: 27.♘d4 (but not 27.♕e1? ♖e6–+) 27...♕e3 The problem is White's rook being stuck on g4; the threat is ...♕xg1, and now 28.♘f3 is met by: 28...d4! The bad bishop arrives to decide the game: 29.h3 (or 29.♘xd4? ♕xg1† 30.♔xg1 ♖f1#) 29...♖xf3 30.gxf3 ♗xf3†–+

25...♕e7!

As Carlsen explains in his analysis, the point of this move is to deprive the knight on c3 of a good square after ...d4. White is pretty much defenceless.



26.♖xf4

Giving up the exchange after all; there was nothing better.

If White simply waits with 26.h3 then Carlsen offers the variation: 26...d4 27.♖e1 (or 27.♘e2 ♘xe2 28.♗xe2 ♗c8! winning an exchange; or 27.♘d1 ♗c8 also winning an exchange) 27...♕xe1†! 28.♕xe1 ♘xd3 Winning a decisive amount of material, for example: 29.♕e7 ♘f2† 30.♔g1 ♘xg4 31.hxg4 dxc3–+

26...♖xf4–+

Black is an exchange up for no compensation. All he needs is to bring his bishop into the game in order to finish it off.

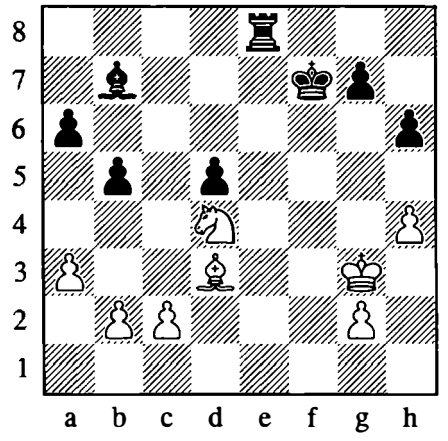
27.♘e2 ♖f1 28.♘d4

If 28.c3, hoping to create a fortress with ♘d4, then 28...♖xg1† 29.♔xg1 ♖e8 threatening ...♕e3 trading queens. 30.♔f2 d4! The bishop enters the fray! 31.cxd4 ♗e4 And Black is winning.

28...♖xg1† 29.♔xg1 ♖e8

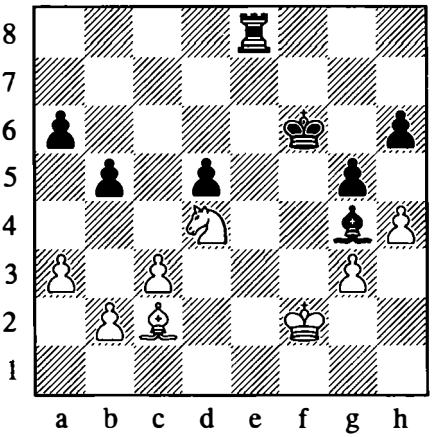
Now the queen trade is unavoidable.

30.h4 ♕e1† 31.♔h2 ♕xg3† 32.♔xg3 ♔f7



The endgame is winning, although the knight on d4 helps White hold the position for a while. The game finished:

33.♔f2 ♔f6 34.g3 ♗c8 35.c3 ♗g4 36.♗c2 g5



37.hxg5† hxg5 38.♗b3 ♔e5 39.♗c2 ♖f8† 40.♔g2 ♗d7 41.♘f3† ♔f6 42.♗b3 g4 43.♘d4 ♔e5

White cannot prevent the creation of weaknesses in his camp with ...a6-a5 and ...b5-b4.

44.♗c2 a5 45.♗d1

Or 45.♗d3 b4 46.axb4 axb4 47.♘e2 bxc3 48.bxc3 ♗f5 49.♗xf5 ♖xf5 followed by ...♔e4-d3.

45...♔e4

White resigns, as the king invasion decides the game.

0–1

Final remarks

1. The message of this game is that White needs a solid centre in order to successfully execute a kingside attack.
2. The break ...f7-f6 can sometimes be weakening for the e6-pawn, but it is a good method to distract attention from White's attack, and it can even gain good counterplay if White is not prepared for this break.

Loek van Wely – Sergey Karjakin

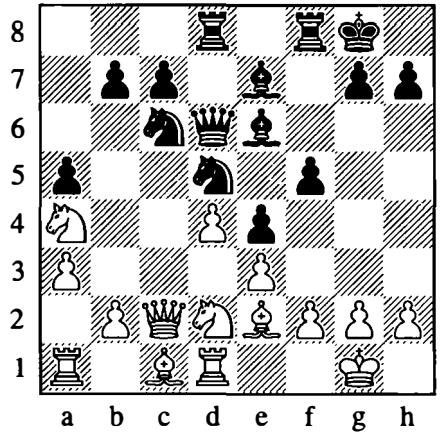
Wijk aan Zee 2012

Learning objective: This game showcases the typical battle between the strong knight and the bad light-squared bishop, but with reversed colours! So it is actually White who has a bad dark-squared bishop.

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.d3 d5 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗e2 0–0 8.0–0 ♗e6 9.a3 a5 10.♕c2 f5

We have a position that is typical of a Scheveningen Sicilian with reversed colours, where the main plan is the central break d3-d4.

11.♘a4 ♕d6 12.♖d1 ♖ad8 13.d4 e4 14.♘d2



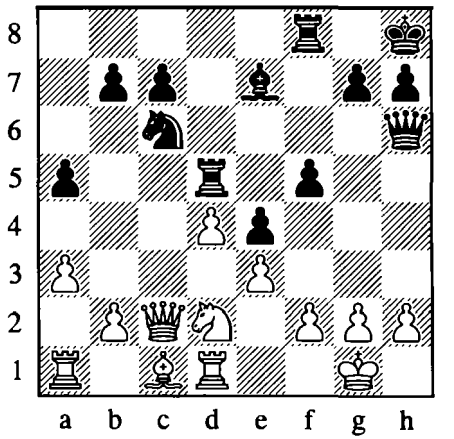
And Black has reached the position of interest under good conditions. This is similar to the game Zhigalko – Rakhmanov. Black has firm control of the d5-square while White's bad bishop is still trapped on c1.

14...♗f7 15.♘c3 ♕h6

The queen begins to eye the kingside.

16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♗c4 ♔h8 18.♗xd5 ♖xd5

The last few moves, although logical, have only accentuated White's positional problem: there is no clear way to bring his bishop into the game.



19.♘f1 ♖d6

A potential idea is to play ...♖g6 with kingside threats.

An interesting alternative was 19...♖d7!? intending to follow up with ...♗d6 and ...♘e7 immediately.

20.b4

The move 20.d5? loses a pawn after 20...♖fd8!.

20...axb4 21.axb4 ♖d7 22.♗d2?

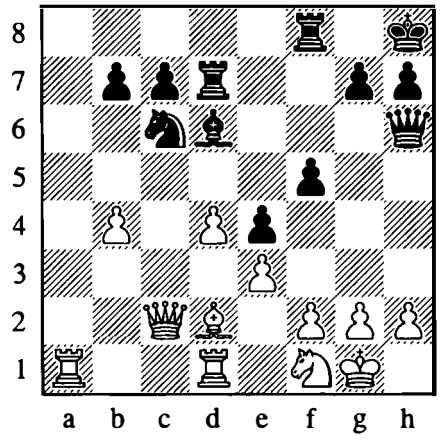
This bishop will not find a way into the game again.

If 22.b5 then simply 22...♘b4 23.♕b3 ♘d3∓ when the knight on d3 is quite disturbing.

The right move was 22.♗a3! attempting to trade off dark-squared bishops, and now 22...b5!? as suggested by GM Marin, yields an approximately balanced game after 23.♘g3 ♕e6 24.♖ac1 since Black's queenside is somewhat weakened, which compensates for White's bad bishop.

22...♗d6!∓

Protecting the c7-pawn and clearing the way for the knight manoeuvre ...♘e7-d5.



23.b5 ♘e7 24.♖a7 b6

White's queenside play runs out of fuel; there are no weaknesses to attack.

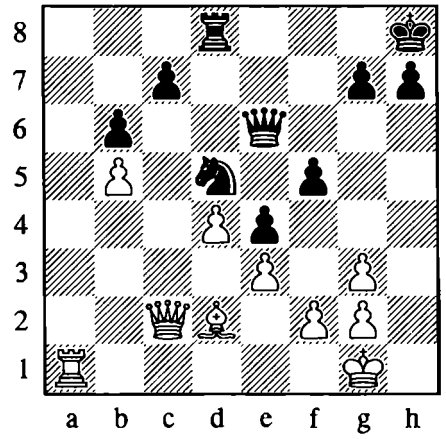
25.♖da1

If 25.♕c4 then Black continues with his plan of 25...♘d5! with a good position, since 26.♕xd5? loses to 26...♗xh2†.

25...♕e6 26.♖a8 ♖dd8 27.♖xd8 ♖xd8 28.♘g3?!

This natural-looking move allows Black to clarify the situation after:

28...♗xg3! 29.hxg3 ♘d5∓



This is a very instructive position to study. My computer evaluates it as '0.00' (complete equality), but this is certainly not the case. Black has a strategically-won position due to the difference between the strong knight on d5, and the rather useless bishop on d2. White's queenside play cannot produce anything, while Black has the opportunity to create a powerful attack on the kingside, as we will see in the rest of this game.

30.♖a7 h6 31.♕a2 ♕e8

Preventing ♖a8, thus keeping the rooks on the board.

32.♕c4 ♕h5

Threatening ...♕d1 winning the bishop.

33.♖a1 ♔h7 34.♗b4 ♕g6 35.♗e1 h5

Black has slowly improved his position, and now the attack begins.

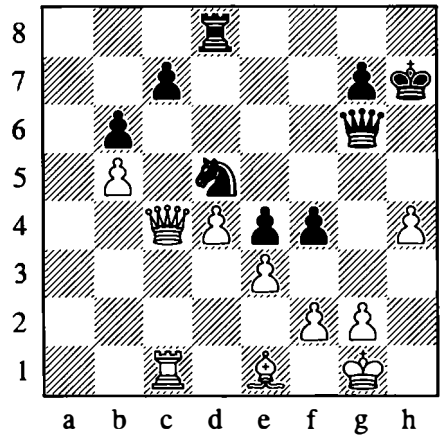
36.♖c1 h4

This is a very nice way of opening the position. It is only now that my computer begins to understand in how much trouble White really is.

Another strong alternative was 36...♕g4!? preparing the break a little further, and now 37.♖c2 h4 (or 37...♖d6!?) 38.gxh4 ♕xh4 39.♖a2 ♕g4 when Black can create a powerful attack with ...f5-f4 or ...♖d6-g6.

37.gxh4 f4

The break ...f5-f4 is strong, just like f4-f5 was strong in Zhigalko – Rakhmanov from earlier in this chapter.



38.♕e2

If 38.exf4 ♘xf4 39.♕f1 (or 39.g3 ♖xd4!∓) 39...♖xd4 Black regains the pawn favourably, since 40.♖xc7? loses on the spot to 40...♖d1 threatening ...♘d3 or ...♖xe1.

Another option was:

38.♗d2 f3 39.g3 ♕f5 40.♔h2

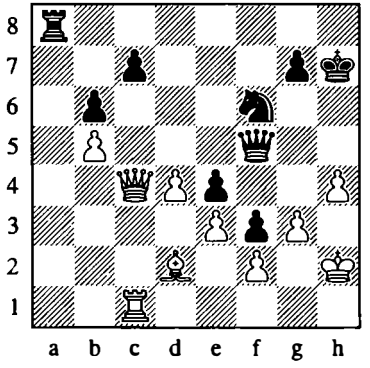
The only move but now Black gains a powerful attack.

The natural-looking 40.♖a1 loses quickly after 40...g5! 41.hxg5 ♖h8 followed by ...♔g6 and ...♕h3 with a winning attack.

40...♖h8

Threatening ...g7-g5.

41.♖h1 ♖a8 42.♖c1 ♘f6!



This is the key move; the threat of ...♘g4xf2 is extremely powerful, and White's position is already near collapse, for example:

43.♕xc7?

Or 43.♖f1 ♖a3 44.♗c3 ♘d5 45.♗d2 ♖d3 46.♗c1 ♕d7∓ and the b5-pawn is probably lost, while ...g7-g5 continues to be a threat.

43...♖a2 44.♖c2 ♘g4† 45.♔g1 ♘xf2! 46.♔xf2

46.♖xa2 ♕h3 and wins.

46...♕h3

With unstoppable mate.

38...f3 39.♕f1 ♕g4 40.g3 g5!

This is a powerful mating threat. White has nothing better than going into a lost endgame.

41.♔h2

The only move.

Not 41.hxg5? since after 41...♔g6! there is no way to prevent checkmate with ...♖h8 and ...♕h5-h1, and if 42.♖c6† simply 42...♔xg5.

Similarly 41.h5? loses in short order after 41...♕xh5 42.♖c6 ♔g7 followed by ...♖h8 and ...♕h1#.

41...gxh4 42.♕h3 ♕xh3† 43.♔xh3 hxg3 44.♔xg3

The queens are off the board, but White's big problem persists: his bishop remains useless on e1.

44...♖g8† 45.♔h2 ♖g2† 46.♔h1 ♖g6 47.♖a1 ♖g8

Black wanders around in search of the right winning plan; he can afford to take things slowly since White does not have any counterplay.

48.♖c1 ♔g6 49.♖c6†

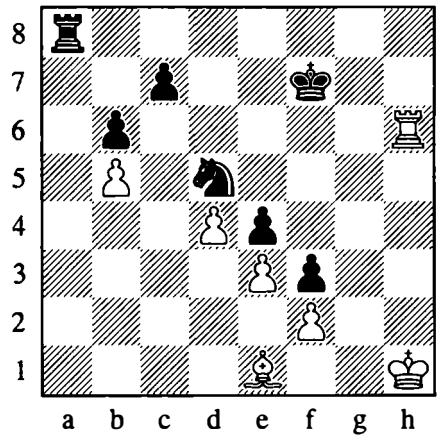
An amusing variation occurs after: 49.♔g1 ♔f5† 50.♔f1? Hoping to get the king out of corner, but now 50...♖g2 51.♗d2 ♘f6! and White's position collapses since 52.♖xc7 ♘g4 wins the f2-pawn to promote the f3-pawn, because 53.♗e1? ♘h2# is the end.

49...♔f7 50.♖h6

White cannot really hope for active play without the cooperation of his bishop, but the "waiting strategy" was also hopeless. If White passively waits with 50.♖c2 then Black has many winning plans. For example, 50...♔e6 51.♖c1 ♔d7 52.♖c2 ♖g2 53.♖c1 ♘f6 54.♖c2 ♘g4 55.♖d2 ♔c8! and White is in zugzwang since 56.♖a2 loses to 56...♘xe3.

50...♖a8

Black has had a winning position for a while, but this is just the moment when White's position collapses.



51.♖h7† ♔g6 52.♖h4 ♘f6

Or: 52...♖a1!? 53.♖g4† ♔f5 54.♖g1 ♖b1–+

53.♗b4 ♔g5 54.♖f4 ♖a1† 55.♔h2 ♘g4†

White resigns. 56.♔h3 loses to 56...♖h1† 57.♔g3 ♖g1† 58.♔h3 ♘xf2† 59.♔h2 ♖g2# and 56.♖xg4† is hopeless after 56...♔xg4.

0–1

Final remarks

1. This game was a fine illustration of how a strong knight can dominate a bad bishop. In fact, White's bishop did not do anything useful throughout the entire game.
2. From this example the reader should learn to treat the bad bishop as a serious problem, and find the first opportunity to trade it or make use of it. In this game, White was probably too careless to realize that 22.♗a3 could secure equality, while 22.♗d2 would lock the bishop inside the pawn chain permanently.
3. From Black's play, the pawn sacrifice 36...h4 followed by 40...g5 was simply superb, as White cannot survive once the position becomes open.

Sebastien Maze – Ni Hua

Biel 2011

Learning objective: In this game we see how strong Black's bad bishop can be when it is outside the pawn chain.

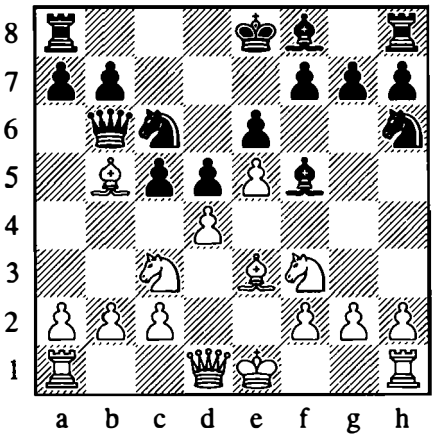
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗e2 c5 6.♗e3 ♕b6 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.♗b5

Another option is the complex 8.0–0 ♕xb2 9.♕e1 cxd4 10.♗xd4 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4 ♗b4.

Now Black goes outside the opening book with:

8...♘h6!?

More common is 8...c4.



9.dxc5

If 9.♗xh6? gxh6 then Black's doubled h-pawns are not vulnerable. 10.0–0 ♖g8 11.dxc5 ♗xc5∓ Followed by 12...0–0–0 and doubling rooks on the g-file.

9...♗xc5 10.♘d4 ♗xd4 11.♗xd4 ♕c7 12.♗xc6† ♕xc6

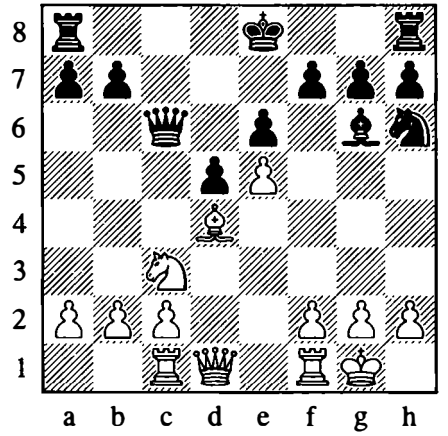
We have reached the structure of interest and, unlike previous examples, Black's bishop is outside the pawn chain controlling an important diagonal.

Another option was 12...bxc6!? 13.♘a4 0–0 14.0–0 ♗g6 15.b3 ♘f5 with a roughly equal position.

13.0–0 ♗g6 14.♖c1

Supporting c2 to release the knight.

If 14.g4 to keep the knight out of the game, there is time for 14...♘g8 15.f4 (or 15.h4? h5!∓) 15...♘e7 16.♕e2 h5!∓ and note how the knight and bishop work well together to prevent a kingside attack and to find counterplay.



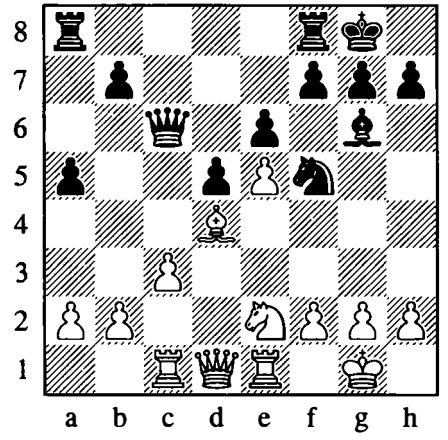
14...♘f5

But not 14...0–0?! since after 15.g4! the g8-square is occupied, hence the knight is out of the game and there is no time for 15...♔h8 to follow with ...♘g8-e7 due to: 16.h4±

15.♘e2 a5

Beginning queenside counterplay.

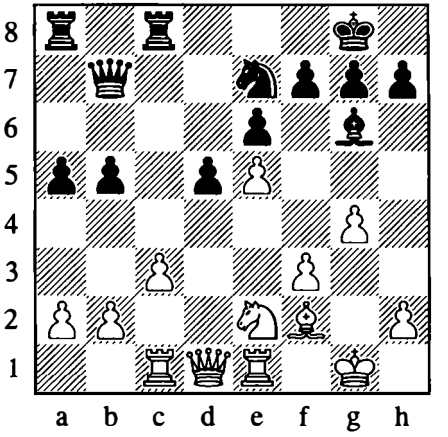
16.c3 0–0 17.♖e1



17...♖fc8

Interesting was 17...♖ac8!? since later in the game, Black could have used a rook on f8.

18.f3 b5 19.♗f2 ♕b7 20.g4 ♘e7



21.h4

Not the healthiest kingside attacking method, but there is nothing better.

The standard set-up with f3-f4, ♘d4 and f4-f5 is ineffective here, for example: 21.f4 b4 22.♕d2 bxc3 23.♖xc3 ♖xc3 24.♘xc3 h5 25.h3 ♖c8∓

21...h5

The sharpest continuation.

An option was 21...h6 22.h5 ♗h7 23.♕d2 b4 24.♘d4 bxc3 25.♖xc3 ♖xc3 26.♕xc3 a4 with level chances.

22.♕d2

Better was 22.gxh5 ♗xh5 23.♘g3 ♗g6 24.h5 ♗h7 25.h6! forcing open some lines, but after 25...♘f5! 26.♘xf5 ♗xf5 27.♕d2 ♕e7 Black is holding well; note again the power of his light-squared bishop.

22...♘c6

Clearing e7 for the queen.

A better continuation was 22...b4! and after 23.♕g5 (or 23.♘g3 hxg4 24.fxg4 ♗h7!?∞) 23...hxg4 24.fxg4 bxc3 25.♖xc3 ♕xb2!? Black can sacrifice a piece to obtain excellent compensation with: 26.♖xc8† ♖xc8 27.♕xe7 ♖c4!

Now a possible continuation is 28.♕d8† ♔h7 29.♘g3 ♖xg4 30.♕xa5 ♗e4 31.♖e3 ♕xe5 followed by ...f7-f5 with promising chances.

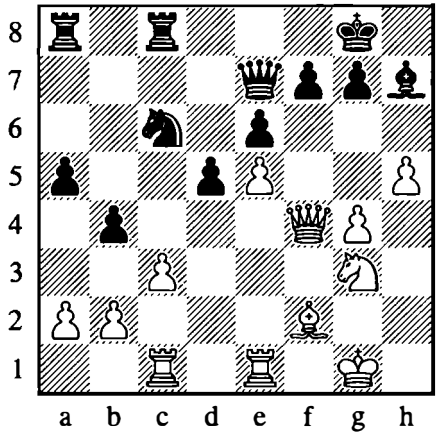
23.♘g3

Now 23.♕g5 is met by 23...♕e7! 24.♕xe7 ♘xe7 25.gxh5 ♗xh5 26.♔g2 b4!?∓ gaining queenside play, while White's kingside plans are dead due to his inflexible pawn structure.

23...hxg4 24.h5 ♗h7 25.fxg4 ♕e7 26.♕f4

We have reached a critical moment. The reader should observe this position and note how crucial is the difference between having the light-squared bishop on c8 and having it on h7. In previous examples the light-squared bishop played no role in the defence, while now it is an integral part of Black's fortress.

26...b4



27.g5?

Much better was:

27.c4!

And the disadvantage to Black of having a bishop on the h7-b1 diagonal becomes evident. Typically c3-c4 allows ...dxc4 giving a powerful diagonal to the bishop on b7. But here only White's pieces will benefit from ...dxc4 as lines open for the rooks and e4 is cleared for the knight.

27...dxc4 28.♖xc4

Black must be precise to avoid problems, for example:

28...♕d7?

Correct is 28...♕b7 29.h6 ♘e7 30.♕g5 ♗g6 with a complicated game where White has a plus.

The text move runs into:

29.h6! ♘e7 30.♖d4 ♘d5 31.♕g5 ♗g6 32.hxg7 ♔xg7 33.♘h5†

And White is winning.

27...bxc3 28.bxc3 ♖ab8∓

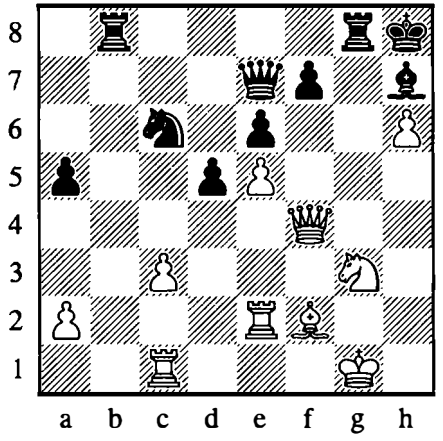
White has voluntarily accepted this position, and we may ask: "Why?" Black's queenside play has resulted in a weak c3-pawn and undisputed control of the b-file (the b1-square is covered by the bishop!). Meanwhile the centre is open and vulnerable, hence White's flank attack is unlikely to work. The game continued:

29.h6?

Increasing White's problems.

Safer was 29.♕g4 ♗d3 30.h6 g6 31.a4 ♖b2 32.♕f4 ♖cb8∓ though Black is in control.

29...gxh6 30.gxh6 ♔h8 31.♖e2 ♖g8



And now it is Black who will attack on the kingside. White is lost already as his pieces are poorly coordinated, while his pawns are spread as weaknesses across the board.

32.♔h2 ♕g5 33.♗e3 ♕xf4 34.♗xf4 ♖g4!

Now White will fall into an unlikely mating net.

35.♖f2 ♖bg8 36.♔h3

The option 36.♔g2 ♗e4† 37.♔h3 ♘e7 is similar to the game.

36...♘e7!

This is the key; the knight comes to f5 clearing the g-file and supporting ...♖h4.

37.♖f3

37.♖g1 doesn't help after 37...♘f5 38.♖f3 ♖h4† 39.♔g2 ♖xf4 40.♖xf4 ♖xg3† 41.♔f2 ♖xc3.

37...♗e4 38.h7 ♔xh7

White resigns, as he is either losing material or getting mated. 39.♖f2 (or 39.♘xe4 dxe4 40.♖f2 ♘f5 followed by ♖h4#) 39...♘f5! 40.♘xf5 ♗xf5 and mate is unstoppable, for example: 41.♗d2 (41.♔h2 ♖h4#) 41...♖g3† 42.♔h2 ♖h3#

0–1

Final remarks

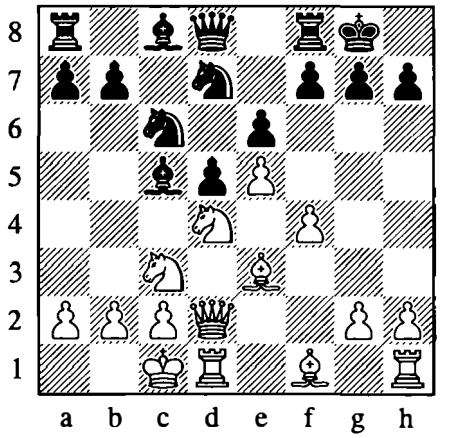
1. The fact that Black's bishop was on the h7-b1 diagonal played a key role throughout the game. The main thing to notice is how White could not carry out his standard f4-f5 break because this bishop was ideally placed to prevent it. Instead he had to settle for the far less effective h2-h4-h5 plan which ultimately backfired.
2. Black's queenside counterplay with ...b5-b4 was also a significant obstacle to White's attack, forcing him to hurry up in his kingside actions. Black probably should have kept an eye on the possible 27.c4! and in retrospect it could have been better to play 22...b4 opening the queenside at once.
3. If we observe the later stages of the game, we see how Black's supposedly bad bishop actually combines attack and defence in an excellent fashion. In contrast, White's bad bishop on f2 really is a bad piece and contributes nothing to the battle.

Evgeniy Najer – Mari Jurcik

Czech Republic 2014

Learning objective: This game is an example of the opposite-flank storms arising after White castles long.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗c5 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0



I did not really want to cover an opposite-sides castling game, as they are often dominated by tactical shots rather than strategy. However, I found this game so interesting and instructive that I could not resist the temptation to include it. The strategic elements previously discussed are still valid: Black has a bad bishop on c8, while White has a strong knight on d4. The ideas of f4-f5 for White, and ...f7-f6 for Black, are still valid. In addition, each player has the possibility of conducting a pawn storm against the opponent's king.

10...a6 11.♘b3

So far both players have followed theory, and now Black deviates with:

11...♗e7

This is not so common. More popular alternatives are 11...♗b4 or 11...b6!?.

12.g4

Now the pawn storm begins and both players prepare an attack.

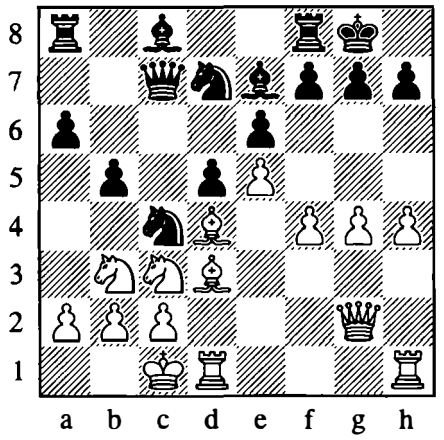
12...b5

The usual idea 12...f6?! does not work as well here after: 13.exf6 (or 13.♘xd5!?) 13...♘xf6 14.h3± White is positionally better due to his harmonious piece placement and the weakened e6-pawn.

13.h4 ♘a5

13...b4!? deserves attention, as White needs to make a crucial decision between placing his knight on a4 or e2. If the knight is placed on a4 it may become subject to attack, say after ...♗b7-c6. If the knight goes to e2, then the advance ...a6-a5-a4 comes more quickly. 14.♘e2 (14.♘a4!?) 14...a5 15.♘bd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♕c7 With balanced chances.

14.♗d4 ♘c4 15.♕g2 ♕c7 16.♗d3



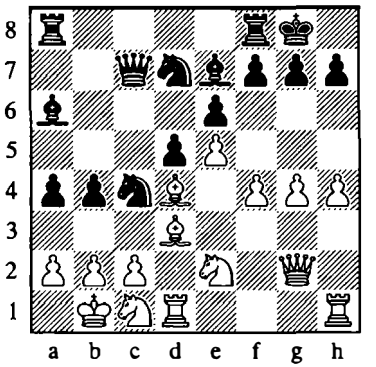
We have reached the critical position in this game. White's last move prepares a very strong attack after h4-h5 and g4-g5-g6, or maybe a sacrifice on h7, or playing ♖dg1. Extreme care is needed from both players.

16...♖b8?

This natural-looking move is actually a near-decisive mistake for Black. I presume he was not familiar with the attacking scheme White intended to use.

A safer alternative was 16...♘c5! intending to trade off some pieces to reduce White's attacking chances: 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 18.♕f2 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 With an approximately balanced game.

The alternative 16...b4!? is ambitious but risky. White faces the dilemma of where to place his knight. 17.♘e2? is too slow after: 17...a5 18.♔b1 a4 19.♘bc1 ♗a6



Black's attack arrives first, for example 20.g5 ♖fc8 21.h5 ♘xb2! with a crushing attack.

But I believe that after the strong 17.♘a4! the complications favour White, since there is no time to go after the knight on a4. For example, 17...♗b7 18.g5 ♗c6 19.h5 ♗xa4 20.♗xh7†! with a winning attack; this is very similar to the game.

17.g5

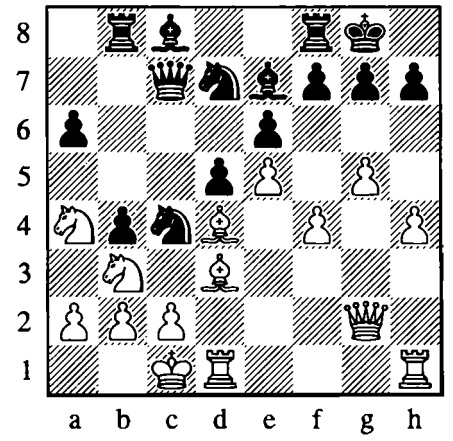
White's attack begins to take shape; at this point I do not really see any good defence against the threat of h4-h5 followed by ♗xh7† as happened in the game.

17...b4

It was too late for Black to trade pieces with 17...♘c5 due to 18.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 19.h5 with a crushing attack, for example: 19...♔g8 20.g6 ♘xb3† 21.axb3 ♗c5 22.h6!

17...♗b4 is futile: 18.h5 ♗xc3 19.bxc3! ♘db6 20.♖dg1 Followed by ♗xh7† or g5-g6 winning.

18.♘a4



This is the final crossroads in the game; the complications are quite instructive.

18...♕c6

More stubborn was the computer move 18...♗b7! and now 19.h5 threatening ♗xh7† is met by: 19...♘e3! (but not 19...♖fc8? 20.♗xh7†! which wins similarly to the game) 20.♗xe3 d4 21.♗e4 ♗xe4 22.♕xe4 dxe3 Black has managed to prevent the threat of ♗xh7†, but now 23.g6!± gives White a strong attack.

Other alternatives do not help, for example: 18...♘db6 19.♘xb6 ♘xb6 20.h5 ♗d8 21.♖dg1 followed by the crushing ♗xh7†.

Or 18...♖d8 19.h5 ♘f8 protecting the h7-pawn, but now 20.g6! (20.♗xh7†!? is possible too) is winning after 20...fxg6 21.hxg6 h6 22.♖xh6! gxh6 23.g7.

19.h5

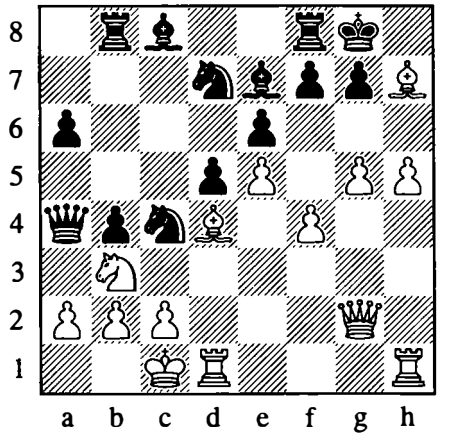
Black's position is completely desperate due to the unavoidable threat of ♗xh7†.

19...♕xa4

19...g6 is no help: 20.♕h3 followed by hxg6 checkmating.

20.♗xh7†!+–

This is a decisive tactical shot that should be remembered. White is willing to be two pieces down, because he knows that the opening of the g- and h-files is decisive.



20...♔h8

20...♔xh7 also fails: 21.g6† ♔g8 (or 21...♔h6 22.gxf7) 22.h6 And there is no good reply against the threat of hxg7, for example: 22...fxg6 23.♕xg6 ♖f7 24.hxg7 ♖xg7 25.♕xe6† ♖f7 26.♖dg1† ♔f8 27.♖h8#

21.g6!

This is the key, posing the unstoppable threat of h5-h6, which opens the g- and h-files decisively.

But not 21.h6?? g6–+ blocking the attack.

21...♕xa2

Note that White's king is completely safe.

Or 21...fxg6 22.♕xg6 followed by h5-h6 and wins.

22.h6

Mate is coming; the game finished:

22...♗c5 23.♕g5 ♗xd4 24.hxg7†
1–0

Black resigned, rather than play out: 24...♔xg7 25.♕h6† ♔h8 26.g7#

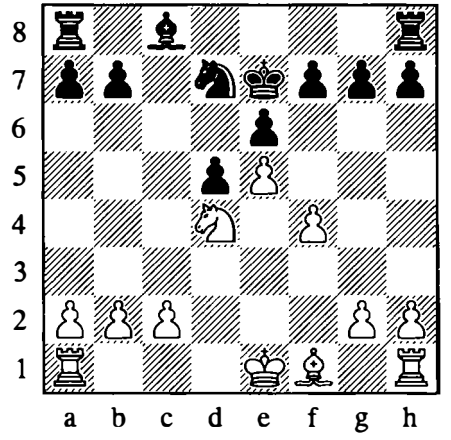
Final remarks

1. Once White castles long, the game becomes very complex and requires precise calculation. Black's biggest mistake was not trading pieces with 16...♘c5, though much calculation was needed to realize this.
2. White's attacking scheme – ♗xh7 followed by g5-g6 and h5-h6 – has an effectiveness of pretty much 100%. Black should avoid it at all costs by running faster on the queenside or trading pieces with ...♘c5 before it is too late.

Trading pieces and the ...g7-g5 break

One of Black's common strategies in this structure is to head directly for a solid endgame either to secure a draw or to outplay White in a long game. As an example take the variation:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗c5 9.♕d2 ♗xd4 10.♗xd4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♕b6 12.♘b5 ♕xd4 13.♘xd4 ♔e7



It is only move 13 and we have already reached an endgame. In fact, this exact position has occurred 75 times in my database and similar positions arise from many variations. White has more space and Black still needs to solve the problem of his bad bishop. Nevertheless, Black has a solid position with many resources, and even the slightest slip from White will convert the game into full equality. The game **Pruijssers – Reinderman**, Netherlands (ch) 2013, continued:

14.♗d3 ♘b8! 15.♔d2 ♘c6

Offering to trade another piece!

16.♘b3

Keeping more pieces on the board, but steering away from the centre.

If 16.c3 ♘xd4 17.cxd4 ♗d7 Black's bad bishop is no problem at all, and after 18.♖ac1 ♖ac8 19.h4 h5 20.b3 f5 21.exf6† gxf6 Black experienced no difficulties in making a draw in Guliyev – Andersson, Maarssen 2013.

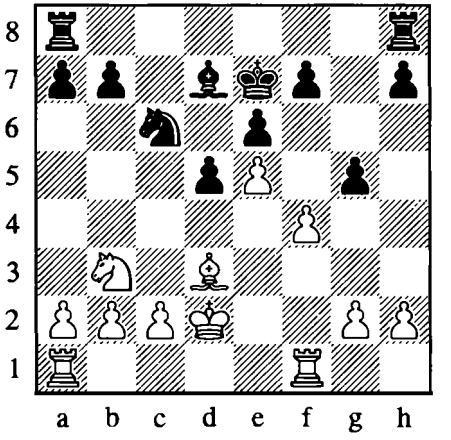
More logical was 16.♘f3 though after 16...♗d7 17.c3 ♖ac8 Black is doing fine.

16...♗d7 17.♖hf1

Now Black finds an opportunity for concrete counterplay against White's centre with:

17...g5!

Undermining the support of the e5-pawn.



18.g3

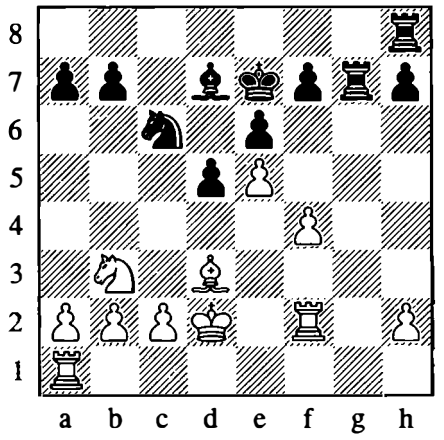
Of course 18.fxg5? is completely illogical and after 18...♖ag8 19.♖ae1 ♖xg5∓ Black is winning the central e5-pawn with a big advantage.

18.♖ae1 is an option. After 18...gxf4 19.♖xf4 ♖ag8 20.g3 ♖g5 21.♘d4! White is just in time to maintain equality since 21...♘xe5 is met by 22.♘f5†! exf5 23.♖xe5† ♔d6 24.♖e3 with level chances, since the f5-pawn could be lost at any time.

18...♖ag8 19.♖f2 gxf4

An alternative was 19...h5!? 20.♖e1 h4 21.c3 hxg3 22.hxg3 ♖h3 23.♖e3 gxf4 24.gxf4 ♖h4 with pressure against the f4-pawn.

20.gxf4 ♖g7

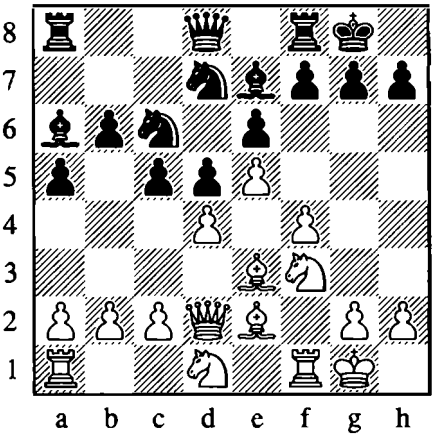


Now Black has gained an open g-file while White has to deal with the vulnerable f4- and h2-pawns. The game is approximately balanced though Black's side is slightly easier to conduct, and indeed Black eventually won the game.

How Black trades his light-squared bishop

A recurring question in this structure is how Black should make use of his light-squared bishop. In the earlier example Van Wely – Karjakin, we saw how useless this bad bishop can be, while the game Maze – Ni Hua was an example of this bishop's potential outside the pawn chain. The latter example came from a line of the Caro-Kann Defence in which Black automatically gets his bishop outside the chain on move 3. Since Black does not achieve this in the French Defence, what should he make of this bishop? In many cases the best approach is to trade it with the typical ...b7-b6 and ...♗a6. Here is an example:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♕d2 0–0 9.♗e2 b6 10.♘d1 a5 11.0–0 ♗a6



Although this exact position has occurred in only a few games on my database, Black's idea of ...b7-b6, ...a7-a5 and ...♗a6 is extremely common and works well. Now the game **Brkic – Kovacevic**, Croatia 2010, continued:

12.♗xa6 ♖xa6 13.a4

If 13.c3 b5 14.dxc5 ♗xc5 Black is ready for the ...b5-b4 break while White lacks the power for a kingside attack.

13...♖a8 14.♘c3 cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.♗xd4

Black has reached the structure of this chapter under good conditions. White is unlikely to succeed with a kingside attack as he lacks his light-squared bishop. Meanwhile Black is ready to play on the c-file.

16...♗b4!?

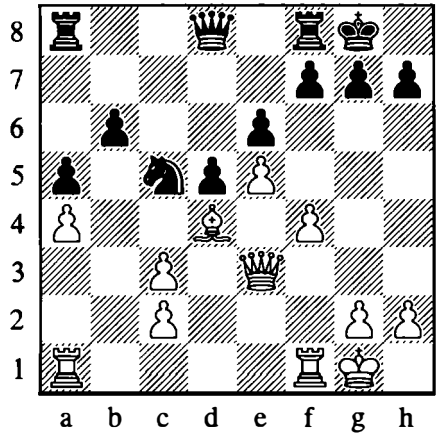
Simplifying the position even further.

17.♕e3 ♗xc3 18.bxc3?

A questionable decision; these c-pawns will be weak for the rest of the game.

A healthier option was 18.♗xc3 though after 18...♘c5 19.♗d4 ♕c8 20.♖f3 ♘e4 21.c3 ♖b8! Black has a small plus as he prepares ...b6-b5, since 22.♗xb6? fails due to: 22...♕a6 23.♗c5 ♘xc5 24.♕xc5 ♖xb2∓

18...♘c5!



19.g4?

This kingside attack is ill-conceived; White does not have the right pieces to create an attack. Things would be different if he had a light-squared bishop on, for example, c2.

White is already worse after 19.♗xc5 bxc5 20.♕xc5 ♖c8 21.♕e3 ♕d7∓ with ...♖c4 to follow.

Better was 19.♖fb1 ♖c8 20.♖b5 and White should be able to keep the balance.

19...♖c8 20.f5 ♕h4 21.♖f4 ♖c6∓

Black has an excellent position; the c3-pawn is already a serious target.

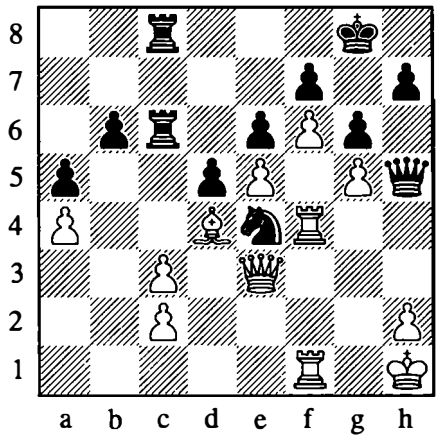
22.♔h1 ♘e4 23.f6

Or 23.♖af1 ♖fc8 24.fxe6 fxe6 25.♖f7 h6!∓ and there is no attack.

23...♖fc8 24.g5 ♕h5

But not 24...♕xg5?? 25.♖xe4 and White wins.

25.♖af1 g6!–+



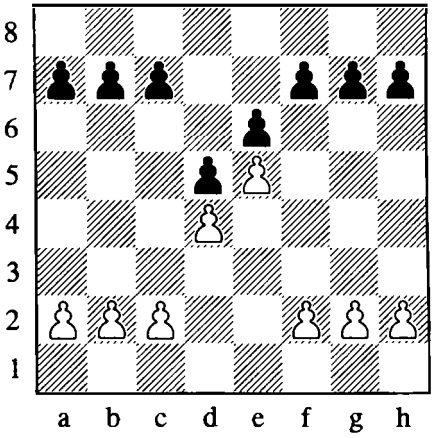
The kingside is safely closed and Black is winning as the c3-pawn is dropping; the rest of the game is irrelevant to our purposes, though Black won easily.

The analysis of this example is deliberately short as the message does not require much explanation. Black was able to obtain an excellent version of this structure by first trading light-squared bishops. Then the moves ...♗e7-b4xc3 simplified the position to obtain a fight between Black's strong knight and White's bad bishop. White should have realized his kingside attack was unlikely to work, especially since his dark-squared bishop was incapable of contributing.

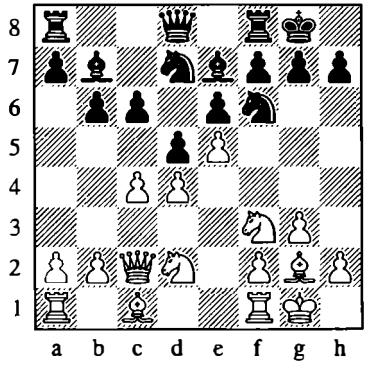
The reader should remember how Black can trade his light-squared bishop (with ...♗a6) and how poor White's attack is without the right minor pieces – for example, without his light-squared bishop, or without a sufficient number of pieces.

Chapter 21

French Type III



This structure will most typically arise from the Advance Variations of the French or the Caro-Kann but it can also be obtained from other openings, such as the Catalan after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 ♗e7 5.♗g2 0–0 6.0–0 c6 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♗b7 10.e5.



There is a strong similarity between the French Type III structure and the King's Indian Type III, which we studied in Chapter 16, which is a mirror version of this structure. Both in that structure and this one, there will be a fight on opposite flanks based on chain operations. White will want to hit near the base of Black's chain, the e6-pawn, with f2-f4-f5, while Black will try the same with ...c7-c5.

Similarly to the analogy we made in the previous chapter, there is one major difference between this structure and Chapter 16, and it is the location of the kings. In Chapter 16, Black was likely to play ...f7-f5-f4 gaining kingside space and therefore having chances for an attack. In contrast, it is White who has attacking chances in this structure because of his e5-pawn. Most likely Black will castle short, though we will also consider the case where Black decides to castle long.

Since this is a closed position, the colour of the bishops will play a significant role. Following the general rule, White's dark-squared bishop and Black's light-squared bishop will be considered 'bad'. But in practice, White's spatial advantage allows him to make good use of his dark-squared bishop. Even from c1 this bishop can prove helpful in a kingside attack. In contrast, if Black's bishop is on its initial square c8, it is likely to be a terrible piece, which is similar to what we learned in the game Van Wely – Karjakin from the previous chapter (with reversed colours). On the other hand, if the black bishop is on f5 or g6, then it's a different story.

Now, let's discuss specific plans.

White's plans

1. Attack the base of Black's pawn chain with f2-f4-f5-fxe6.
2. Create a powerful kingside attack with f2-f4-f5-f6 followed by mate threats on the g7-square.

3. Attack Black's kingside with rooks along the third rank, a bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal, and a queen typically placed on h5. A piece sacrifice on the kingside is also likely to work well.

Black's plans

1. Attack the base of the chain, White's d4-pawn, with ...c7-c5xd4, ...♘c6, ...♕b6. In some cases use major pieces to invade along the c-file.
2. Advance ...c7-c5-c4, and then attack the new base of the chain (the c3-pawn) with ...b7-b5-b4. This plan can be too slow if White has good attacking chances on the kingside.
3. Trade light-squared bishops on the f1-a6 diagonal (say with ...b7-b6 followed by ...♗a6) or make good use of this bishop along the h7-b1 diagonal.
4. Slow down White's kingside attack with ...f7-f5, or even fight for counterplay with the more confrontational ...f7-f6.

White's Plans 1 and 2 are very effective while the centre remains firmly closed. The pawn chain and the spatial advantage prevent Black from effectively manoeuvring and defending the kingside. This allows White's checkmating attack and even piece sacrifices to work very well. For this reason Black must find a way to break in the centre or slow down the attack with either Plan 1 or Plan 4, that is ...c7-c5, ...f7-f6, or ...f7-f5.

White's Plan 3 (a kingside attack using pieces more than pawns, particularly a bishop on d3) is *not* one I will cover in much detail in this chapter. Tactics will dominate, so it is not a good fit for my purposes. The extreme example is the Greek Gift – the bishop sacs on h7, then a knight check on g5 and queen to h5. All great fun and still winning a few points in the 21st century, but a topic for another day.

Black's Plan 1 can be very effective if White is unable to defend the d4-pawn or unable cover the c2-square, which is the entry point for Black's rooks. If White can protect both these points well, then this plan can be a big disappointment, since the capture ...cxd4 means Black no longer has a queenside break to execute. Meanwhile White can proceed with his desired kingside attack. Something to note about Black's Plan 2 is that this plan is rather slow, and therefore it is far more likely to work well if Black has castled long, away from White's kingside play. In such a case, this plan can also be combined with a potential kingside attack based on ...f7-f6, ...g7-g5 and so on.

The first game in this chapter illustrates how White is able to give up control of the c-file and still have a good position as long as he can control Black's entry points (the c2- and c1-squares). White then proceeds with his standard f4-f5 plan.

The second example illustrates a particular type of plan that is not always relevant to this structure (and partly for that reason I did not mention it in the list above) but is important if Black's light-squared bishop is exchanged on g6. Then once Black has recaptured with ...hxg6, White can go for an h4-h5 break and subsequent kingside attack.

The third game is an example of Black's Plan 4 while the fourth game is a combination of Black's Plans 2 and 4. Then the last game brings together many of Black's ideas into one elegant example.

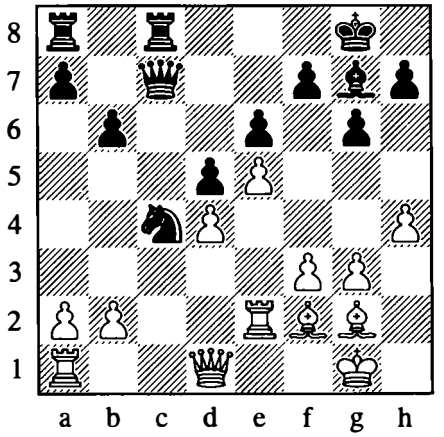
Julio Granda Zuniga – Marc Narciso Dublan

Zaragoza 2012

Learning objective: This game shows how White can give up the c-file, cover Black's entry points (such as c2) and then simply proceed with his standard kingside plans.

The first twenty moves are irrelevant to our study. But I include them to show how this pawn structure can arise from many openings, and not just from the French.

1.♘f3 d6 2.d4 ♗g4 3.g3 ♗xf3 4.exf3 e6 5.♗g2 c6 6.0–0 g6 7.♖e1 ♘f6 8.c3 ♗g7 9.♘d2 0–0 10.♘e4 d5 11.♘c5 b6 12.♘d3 ♘bd7 13.♗e3 ♕c7 14.f4 ♘e8 15.f3 ♘d6 16.♗f2 c5 17.h4 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖fc8 19.♘e5 ♘c4 20.♖e2 ♘dxe5 21.fxe5



After an unusual start, we have reached the thematic structure. The reader should begin by assessing the position. Who is better? One of my students said, "Black's obviously better, as he dominates the c-file, and has a strong knight on c4." Then I asked, "How exactly do you make use of the c-file?" and suddenly he began to hesitate. When I first studied this game I thought White had to fight for equality, but this superficial evaluation was simply wrong. After a long analysis, I concluded Black is already in very serious trouble, as he cannot create serious threats on the queenside. Black's position looks okay, to say the least, but there aren't real entry points down the c-file, since the c2-square is protected. In addition, White does not have any weakness on the queenside.

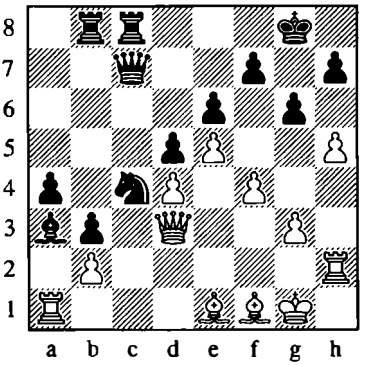
Then, why should White be better in this position? White's advantage is a result of his space, his ability to protect the c2-square and the d4-pawn. In addition, Black's kingside was weakened by ...g7-g6, which does not mix well with the e6-d5 chain by weakening dark squares and allowing White to break with h4-h5. The game continued:

21...♕d7

To double rooks on the c-file, as there is not really anything better to do.

If 21...a5?! planning to follow with ...a5-a4-a3 to create some targets in White's queenside, then 22.a4! threatens b2-b3 trapping the knight, and after 22...♗f8 23.♖c2 (but not 23.b3?! ♘a3 24.♖ea2 ♕c3 with counterplay) 23...♕b7 24.b3 ♘a3 25.♖ca2± followed by ♖xa3 gaining two pieces for a rook.

An interesting attempt is to play: 21...b5!? If White simply continues his play on the kingside with 22.h5?! b4 23.f4 a5 24.♗f1 a4 25.♗e1 ♗f8 26.♕d3 then Black can obtain interesting counterplay with: 26...b3!? (but not 26...a3? 27.b3 ♘b2 28.♕e3± when Black's counterplay runs out of fuel) 27.a3 ♖ab8 28.♖h2 ♗xa3!?



Sacrificing a piece to create a passed pawn on the b-file, and now 29.hxg6 fxg6 30.bxa3 b2 31.♖b1 ♖b3 with an unclear position.

Instead, it is best for White to first gain partial control of the c-file with 22.♖c2 ♕d7 23.♖ac1 ♗f8 24.♗f1± and only now continue with a pawn storm against Black's king.

22.h5!±

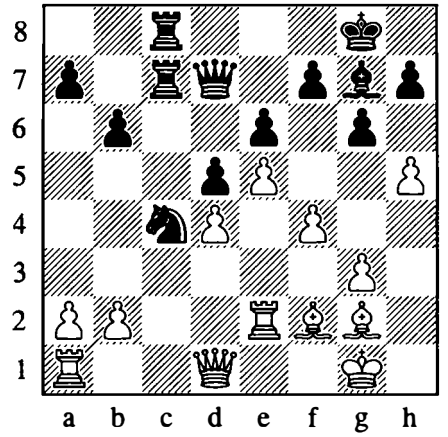
This marks the beginning of a good plan; Granda Zuniga understands it will take a long while before Black's doubled rooks on the c-file can create any serious threats, so he begins a kingside expansion immediately.

If White chooses to advance his pawns in a different order with 22.f4?! then 22...h5! makes it difficult to continue advancing optimally.

22...♖c7

Most humans would not like to play 22...gxh5?! as it weakens the kingside pawn structure permanently. A good continuation would be: 23.f4 ♖c6 (23...f5?! only makes matters worse after 24.exf6 ♗xf6 25.♕d3± followed by ♖ae1 and ♗h3 pressuring the e6-pawn) 24.♕d3 ♖ac8 25.f5!± With the positional threat of f5-f6. The pawn cannot be captured with 25...exf5? due to 26.♗h3 followed by ♗xf5, when Black's pawn structure is simply destroyed.

23.f4 ♖ac8



Black has doubled rooks on the c-file, but how will he continue?

24.♗f1

The bishop on g2 was rather useless, and this move has two purposes:

1. To clear the second rank for a future transfer ♖e2-f2 to support g3-g4 and f4-f5.
2. To prepare a future ♗f1-d3 to attack the kingside along the b1-h7 diagonal.

24...♗f8

Black's inferiority becomes apparent, as the rooks are doubled on the c-file but there is no clear-cut path to creating threats.

If 24...♕b5 simply 25.♖c2!?± followed by ♗d3 with an excellent position for White.

25.♗e1

This move is not really about preventing ...♗f8-b4, but rather about clearing the second rank to continue with g3-g4, ♖e2-f2 and f4-f5.

25...b5 26.♕d3

Covering the e3-square to release the rook.

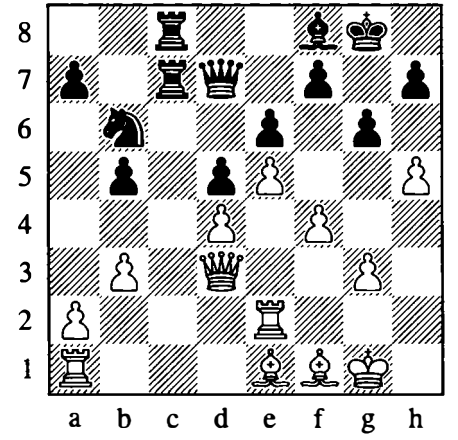
But not 26.♖f2? ♘e3 27.♕d3 ♘xf1 28.♖xf1 ♖c4∓ when Black's queenside play begins to work.

26...♘b6

Preparing ...♖c7-c1.

By now it is too late to start pushing queenside pawns with 26...b4 since White's kingside attack arrives first, for example: 27.g4 a5 28.f5 g5 Hoping to keep lines closed. 29.♖f2 a4 30.♕f3± Followed by ♗d3 with multiple threats.

27.b3±



This move prevents Black's knight from coming into the game again.

27...♖c1

Black's "invasion" down the c-file will be short lived.

If Black just waited with 27...a6 then 28.g4± followed by ♖f2 and f4-f5 with a strong attack.

28.♖xc1 ♖xc1 29.♗d2

Simple and effective; the rook on c1 has nothing to do, so it is forced to retreat.

29...♖c7

29...♖a1? is bad because of 30.♗c3 ♖c1 31.♕d2 ♖b1 32.♕c2 and the rook is trapped.

Similarly, if 29...♖d1? then 30.♕c2 ♖a1 31.♗c3 and wins.

30.♖f2

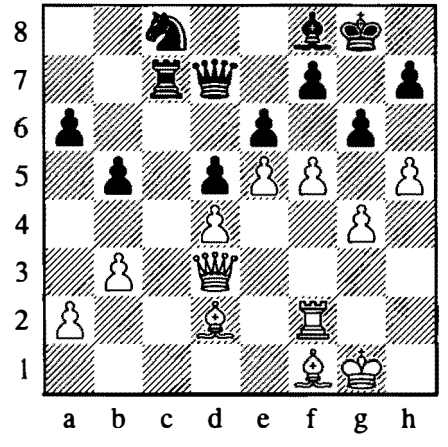
Attacking the b5-pawn and preparing g3-g4 and f4-f5.

30...a6

If Black plays 30...♘c8 White does not even have to bother capturing the b5-pawn, but instead can continue attacking with 31.g4 ♘e7 32.f5! exf5 33.gxf5 ♘xf5 34.♗h3 winning, since the capture ♗xf5 will fatally expose Black's king.

31.g4 ♘c8 32.f5

Achieving the typical f4-f5 break against Black's pawn chain. White's positional and tactical attack is simply irresistible.



32...exf5

32...♘e7 doesn't help due to: 33.hxg6 hxg6 (or 33...fxg6 34.f6 ♘c6 35.f7† ♔h8 [35...♔g7 36.♕h3+–] 36.♗g5+– threatening ♗f6) 34.f6 Setting up a mating net: 34...♘c6 35.♖h2 ♘xd4 36.♕h3

33.gxf5 ♘e7 34.f6

34.♗h3!? was also winning.

34...♘c6 35.♗h3 ♕e8 36.hxg6 hxg6 37.♔f1

Another option was 37.♗g4!? followed by ♖h2 and ♕h3.

37...♘d8

37...♗b4 doesn't help: 38.♗xb4 ♘xb4 39.♕d2 ♕f8 40.e6+– The pawn cannot be taken by 40...fxe6? due to 41.♗xe6† ♔h8 42.♖h2† when mate is coming.

38.♗g4

There is no defence against ♖h2 and ♕h3.

38...♕c6 39.♖h2 ♗g7 40.fxg7 f5 41.♖h8† ♔xg7 42.♕h3
1–0

Final remarks

1. White was able to win this game because he understood that the structure transformation on moves 17 and 21 was favourable to him. The key was his ability to protect c2 and d4.
2. Black was left without a plan because he could not make use of the c-file and because it was not even worthwhile to attack the well-supported d4-pawn. There are no other plans for Black to try in this position.
3. White's kingside attack rolls on very easily, but Granda Zuniga's play on moves 22-30 is worthy of praise. White's forces were ideally synchronized to neutralize Black's play while preparing the f4-f5 break.

Magnus Carlsen – Wang Hao

Wijk aan Zee 2011

Learning objective: This game illustrates White's kingside attack with h2-h4-h5 after a trade on g6, where Black recaptures ...hxg6.

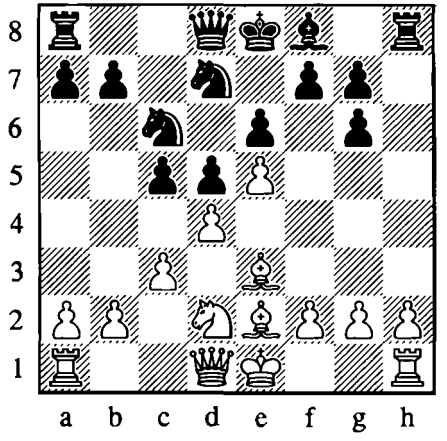
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♗e3 e6 5.♘d2 ♘d7 6.♘gf3 ♗g6 7.♗e2 ♘e7 8.♘h4 c5

More common is 8...♘f5 9.♘xf5 (but not 9.♘xg6?! ♘xe3 10.fxe3 hxg6 11.♘f3 g5 when Black has good counterplay) 9...♗xf5 when Black is likely to keep his bishop on the h7-b1 diagonal with a good position; this is similar to the game Babaev – Burmakin which we study later in this chapter.

9.c3 ♘c6?!

It was not too late for 9...♘f5!? 10.♘xg6 (or 10.♘xf5 ♗xf5) 10...hxg6 11.♘f3 ♘xe3 12.fxe3 g5!? with reasonable counterplay.

10.♘xg6 hxg6



This small structural change must not be taken lightly. On the plus side, the capture ...hxg6 gives additional support to f5 while opening the h-file. Both these factors make the f4-f5 break harder to achieve. On the negative side, a black pawn on g6 means White can break on the kingside with h2-h4-h5 to later invade down the h-file.

Now that we understand how the structure affects the plans, we proceed with the game.

11.♘f3

White will not gain much from f4-f5, for example, after 11.0–0 ♗e7 12.f4 ♕b6 13.♕b3 cxd4 14.♕xb6 ♘xb6 15.cxd4 0–0 16.g4 ♖ac8 17.f5 gxf5 18.gxf5 exf5 19.♖xf5 Black's kingside is safe, and after 19...♘b4!? it is White who must fight for equality.

11...♖c8?

Black will not be able to secure a safe place for his king, as he can no longer castle long.

As Postny points out, the variation 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♕a5† is nothing special for Black, as after 13.♔f1!± White will proceed with g2-g3, h2-h4 and ♔g2 which is similar to the game.

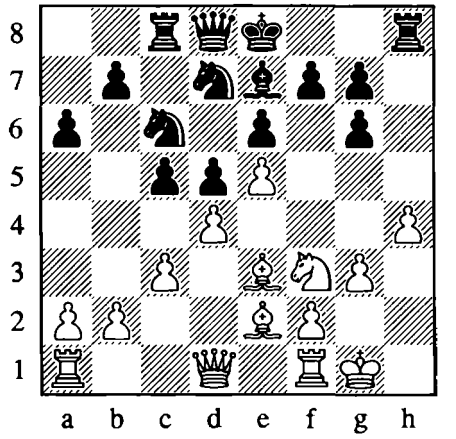
An independent try is 11...♕c7!? 12.0–0 ♗e7 13.g3 0–0–0 14.♔g2 ♔b8 15.♗f4± when White has a comfortable advantage, though Black is solid for now.

12.0–0 a6

The plan is ...b7-b5-b4 or ...c5-c4, but this is far too slow.

13.g3 ♗e7 14.h4!±

Launching a kingside attack; Black needs to react quickly.



14...b5

Black cannot castle safely as after 14...0–0 15.♔g2 ♕b6 16.♖b1 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘a5 18.♖h1 ♘c4 19.♗f4! the break h4-h5 yields a very strong attack. For example: 19...♘xb2 20.♕d2 ♗a3 21.h5 And now a semi-forced line is 21...gxh5 22.♖xh5 ♖fe8 23.♖bh1 ♔f8 24.♖h8† ♔e7 25.♗g5† f6 26.exf6† gxf6 27.♖1h7† ♔d8 28.♖xe8† ♔xe8 29.♘e5! with deadly threats.

The typical central break 14...f6!? 15.exf6 gxf6 is quite weakening, and after 16.♖e1 ♔f7 17.♗f1 White has a big advantage. Nevertheless, this move manages to divert attention away from the strong h4-h5 break.

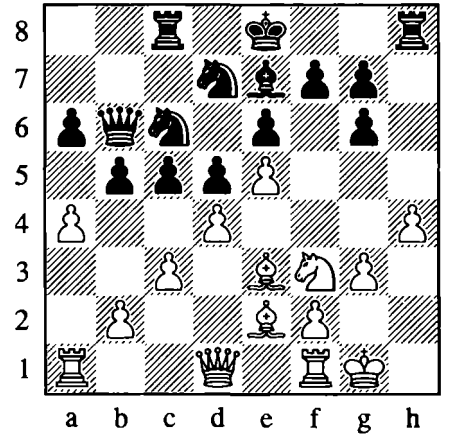
15.a4!

Opening the a-file and making use of the rook on a1.

Instead 15.♔g2, to follow with ♖h1 immediately, allows 15...cxd4 16.cxd4 ♘b6 17.b3 ♘b4 when the threat of ...♘c2 diverts some attention away from the kingside, though White is still much better after 18.♗g5!?.

15...♕b6

Or 15...c4 16.b4! closing the queenside, since 16...cxb3? only benefits White after: 17.axb5 axb5 18.♕xb3±



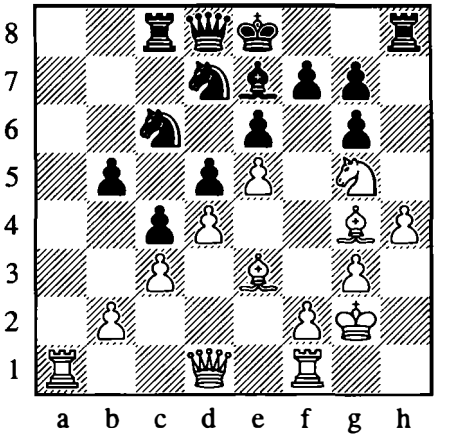
16.axb5 axb5 17.♔g2 c4 18.♘g5 ♕d8

Momentarily preventing h4-h5.

White is also much better after 18...♗xg5 19.♗xg5 b4 20.h5 ♘f8 21.♖h1 gxh5 22.♗xh5 g6 23.♗g4± followed by an h-file invasion.

19.♗g4!±

Threatening 20.♗xe6.



19...♗xg5

The alternative 19...♘f8 is similar to the game after 20.♕f3 ♗xg5 21.♗xg5 ♕b6 22.h5 gxh5 23.♗xh5 ♕b7 24.♖h1± threatening 25.♗xf7†.

The careless 19...b4? loses to 20.♗xe6! fxe6 21.♘xe6 ♕b6 22.♕g4 ♔f7 23.♘f4.

20.♗xg5 ♕c7 21.♖h1 ♘b6 22.h5

Opening the h-file decisively.

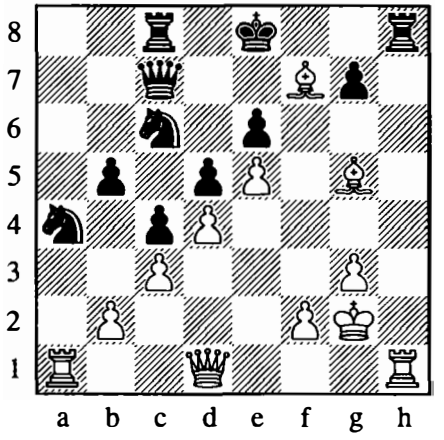
22...gxh5 23.♗xh5 ♘a4

This is a standard move in Black's ...c5-c4 plan, pressuring b2, but here Black is losing the race by several moves.

If 23...♘d8, protecting the f7-pawn, then 24.♗g4 ♖g8 25.♕c2! and the invasion on the h-file is decisive, for example: 25...♘a4 26.♕h7 ♔f8 27.♖h4 ♘xb2 28.♖ah1 b4 29.♕xg8†! ♔xg8 30.♖h8#

24.♗xf7†!

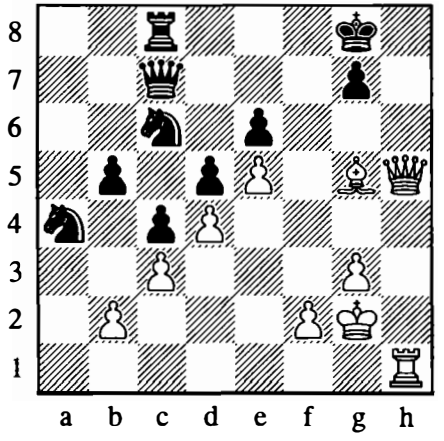
A decisive piece sacrifice; note how White's e5-pawn plays an important role in many critical variations.



24...♔xf7 25.♕f3† ♔g8

If 25...♔g6 26.♗f6! Black is getting checkmated due to the threat of ♕g4† and ♕xg7, and 26...♔f7 (26...gxf6 27.♕xf6#; or 26...♖cg8 27.♖xh8 ♖xh8 28.♕g4† ♔f7 29.♕xg7† ♔e8 30.♕xc7+–) 27.♗d8† loses the queen.

26.♖xh8† ♔xh8 27.♖h1† ♔g8 28.♕h5!



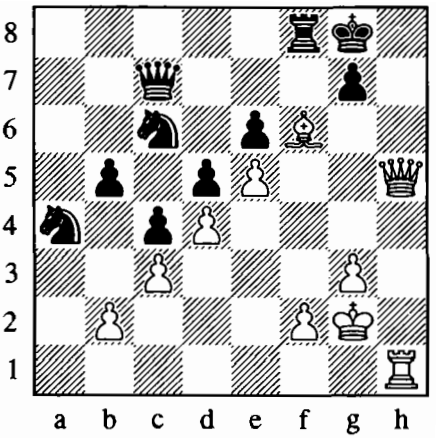
A strong quiet move which decides the game due to the threat of 29.♗f6 with a mating net.

28...♖f8

The king cannot escape with 28...♔f8 due to 29.♕g6! threatening ♖h8, and after 29...♔g8 30.♗f6! there is no defence against 31.♖h7. For example: 30...♕f7 31.♖h8†!

28...♘xe5 loses to 29.♗f4! ♖f8 30.♗xe5 ♕e7 31.♕g6! followed by ♖h7.

29.♗f6!



Black resigns as he is either getting mated or losing his queen. 29...♕c8 (or 29...gxf6 30.♕h8† ♔f7 31.♕h7† ♔e8 32.♕xc7) 30.♕h7† ♔f7 31.♕xg7† ♔e8 32.♖h7 Followed by ♕g6 and a quick mate.

1–0

Final remarks

1. The capture 10...hxg6 changed the nature of the position, as the h4-h5 break became stronger than the typical f4-f5 break.
2. Black's biggest problem was an incorrect positional evaluation. White's d4-pawn was well protected, and the plan ...c5-c4, ...b7-b5-b4 was far too slow against White's h4-h5 break. If Black had realized this opposite-flank race was lost, he probably would have played 11...♕c7 in order to castle long.
3. In retrospect, I believe 14...f6 was a reasonable option. It certainly looks terrible as the pawns on e6, f6 and g6 make a very vulnerable team. However, by trading the e5-pawn White's attacking chances are reduced and Black manages to stay in the game for longer.

Sergei Zhigalko – Julian Radulski

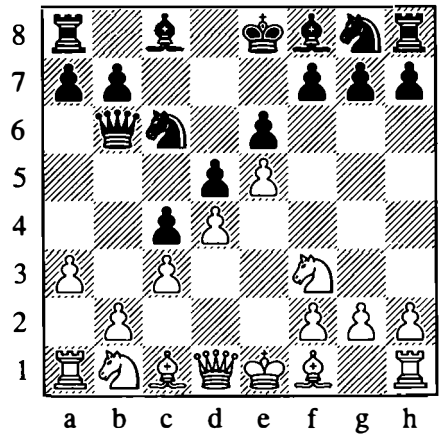
Warsaw 2010

Learning objective: This game illustrates how Black may effectively carry out the ...c5-c4 plan, subsequently castling long and creating a kingside attack.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♕b6 6.a3

To play b2-b4, forcing Black to release the tension on d4.

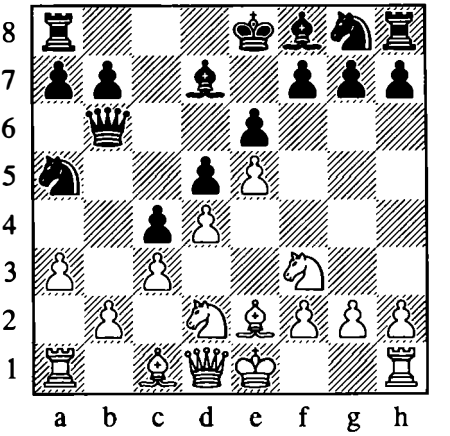
6...c4



Pushing ...c5-c4 is often a double-edged decision. The pawn on c5 was attacking the base of White's chain, the d4-pawn. Once ...c5-c4 has been played, the new base of the chain is the c3-pawn and in order to attack it Black should play ...b7-b5-b4 together with ...a7-a5. This plan is often stronger than attacking the d4-pawn, but it is also much slower. In fact, it is so slow that if Black were to castle short, then White would probably be able to deliver mate before Black manages to break with ...b5-b4; take the previous game as an example.

In this game, Black will ensure the safety of his king by castling long. In such a case, White would like to insist on an attack by playing b2-b3 opening lines, but here this is not easy because he has already played a2-a3. That is essentially the strategic justification of the previous moves and this is why Black did not play ...c5-c4 until White had played a2-a3. Now let's see how the game continued.

7.♘bd2 ♘a5 8.♗e2 ♗d7



9.0–0

Over the last couple of years the move 9.♖b1!? has become more popular, as White wants to open the b-file to have an attack once Black castles queenside. Recent games have continued with: 9...♘e7 (but 9...♕c7!? is enough to prevent b2-b4 for the moment, obtaining a position similar to the game) 10.b4 cxb3 11.♘xb3 The b-file is open, and now if Black attempts to win an exchange with 11...♗a4 then simply: 12.♘xa5! ♕xa5 (or 12...♗xd1?! 13.♖xb6 axb6 14.♗b5† ♔d8 15.♘xb7† ♔c7 16.♔xd1 ♔xb7 17.♘g5± as in the game Rapport – Apicella, France 2013) 13.♕d2 b5 14.♗d3 a6 15.0–0 ♖c8 16.♕e2 h6 17.♗d2 With a fighting position as in the game Duda – Wang Yiye, Al-Ain 2013.

9...♘e7 10.♖b1 ♕c7 11.♘e1

Opening the b-file with 11.b4? no longer works due to: 11...cxb3 12.♘xb3 ♗a4∓

Another possible plan was 11.♖e1 ♘c8 12.♘f1 ♘b6 13.♗f4 ♗a4 14.♕c1 ♘b3 15.♕e3 when Black's king will be safe on the queenside but White will expand on the kingside anyway.

However, the game will not be "one-sided" as White's kingside attack may become dangerous to his own king. Overall, chances are approximately equal as in the game Nakamura – Pelletier, Biel 2005.

11...0–0–0 12.♗g4 ♔b8

So far both players are following rather standard plans; Black's king is safe on the queenside, while White is ready to begin a kingside expansion. But now:

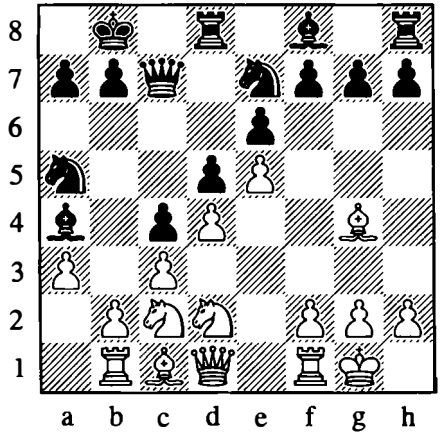
13.♘c2?!

This is not the best way to proceed.

13.f4 was a better alternative, and after 13...g6 14.♘df3 ♗g7 15.♗h3 the position is complicated, but chances are approximately balanced. White must expand on the kingside with extreme care, so as not to allow strong counterplay. For example, 15...♖dg8 16.g4? would certainly be a premature decision, since now 16...h5! gives Black an excellent game.

13...♗a4!

A good and rather thematic move. This bishop permanently prevents White from obtaining queenside play, and now it also makes White's manoeuvres more difficult due to the pin.



14.♘f3

To illustrate why the pin is annoying, notice that the normal 14.f4 can now be met by 14...h5!? 15.♗h3 (not 15.♗xh5? ♗xc2 16.♕xc2 ♖xh5 and wins) 15...♘f5 16.♘f3 ♗e7 with a good game for Black.

14...♘c8 15.♕e2 ♘b6

This knight transfer is very typical of the position; it reinforces the control of the queenside, and may help in a future expansion. The position is critical and White needs to find the right way to react on the kingside.

16.h4?!

But this is not it, as we shall see.

It was better to play 16.♘g5!? improving the knight: 16...h6 17.♘h3 ♗e7 18.♘f4!? (or 18.f4!? with a normal position) Now the knight is pretty good on f4, as it makes it difficult for Black to play ...f7-f5 (or ...f7-f6) and helps prepare a slow-paced kingside expansion with g2-g3 and h2-h4-h5.

16...♔a8?!

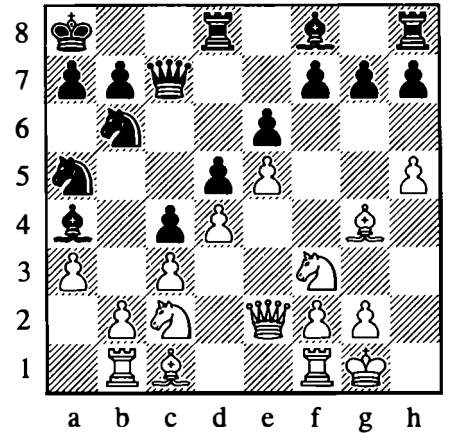
This is a normal move, but it misses a stronger continuation.

A strong option was: 16...f5! 17.♗h3 (Or 17.exf6 gxf6 when Black can soon develop an unpleasant kingside initiative. The e6-pawn is untouchable since 18.♗xe6? loses to 18...♖e8 followed by ...♗d7.) 17...h6 Black will continue with ...♗e7, ...♖dg8 and ...g5 with an extremely powerful kingside attack.

17.h5?

White does not realize how many problems he is about to face. In fact, this move makes Black's reaction even stronger, as the h5-pawn will become a target.

Again 17.♘g5 would have prevented Black's strong kingside reaction with ...f7-f5 and after 17...h6 18.♘h3 g6 19.♗f4 the game is approximately balanced.



17...f5!!

A wonderful move! A double exclamation mark is not an exaggeration: the move is both strong and nearly decisive. This is a reaction the reader should never forget: by using a tactical resource, Black achieves the ...f7-f5 push, after which he dominates the game for the following reasons:

1. He clearly controls the queenside; he has nothing to fear on this flank.
2. He can now begin to expand on the kingside with an eventual ...g7-g5.
3. He can easily create an attack against White's king.
4. White is inferior on both flanks, hence he cannot create counterplay.

18.♗h3

It is probably better to take on f6, in order to prevent Black's kingside expansion with ...g7-g5, but in this case 18.exf6 gxf6 does not really help White either, since his position is so weakened: 19.♖e1 (not 19.♗xe6? ♖e8–+ followed by ...♗d7) 19...♖e8 20.♗h3 ♗d6 21.♘e3 ♕f7∓ Black is about to create a strong attack down the g-file, and the h5-pawn is falling.

If 18.♘g5 fxg4 19.♘xe6 ♕d7 20.♘xd8 ♕xd8∓ the two pieces are far stronger than a rook in this position.

18...♕f7

Attacking the weak h5-pawn.

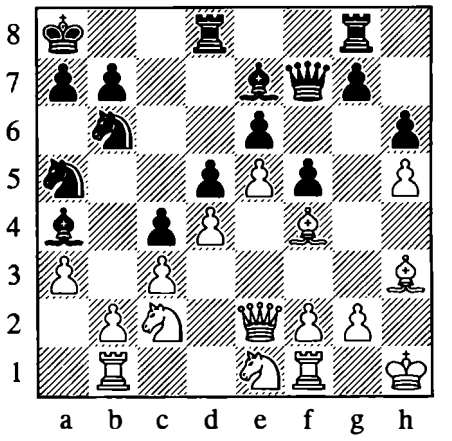
19.♘g5

If 19.h6 gxh6 Black is simply a pawn up, as the doubled h-pawns are quite useful. For example: 20.g3 ♖g8 21.♔h2 ♗xc2 22.♕xc2 ♗e7 23.♕e2 (23.♗xh6? loses a piece to 23...♕h5) 23...♗g5 24.♖g1 ♖df8∓ With threats such as ...f5-f4 or ...♘b3.

19...♕g8 20.♗f4 h6 21.♘f3 ♕f7

Even stronger was 21...♗xc2! 22.♕xc2 ♕f7 winning the h5-pawn and the game after 23.g3 ♕xh5 24.♗g2 g5.

22.♘fe1 ♖g8 23.♔h1 ♗e7



24.♘e3?!

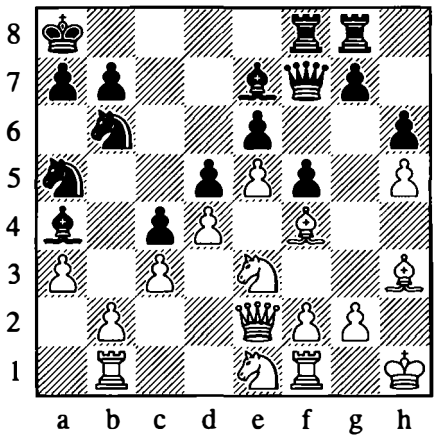
White is struggling to manoeuvre, having little space.

More stubborn was 24.♗h2 ♖df8 25.f4 but after 25...g5 26.hxg6 ♕xg6∓ White remains in deep trouble.

24...♖df8

Preparing ...♗e8 and ...♕xh5.

The premature 24...♗e8 is answered by 25.g4 fxg4 26.♕xg4 though Black preserves an advantage after: 26...g5! 27.♗h2 ♕h7!?∓



25.♗h2 ♗e8 26.g4?

Making things easier for Black.

The last attempt was 26.f4 ♕xh5 27.g4! since after 27...♕xh3 (or 27...♕g6!?∓) the queen gets trapped: 28.♖f3 ♕h4 29.♘1g2 But even so Black is better after 29...fxg4 30.♘xh4 gxf3 31.♘xf3 g5∓ with the strong threat of ...♗g6-e4.

26...f4 27.♘3c2 f3 28.♕d1 g6–+

Black opens the kingside decisively.

29.hxg6 ♕xg6 30.♖g1

30.♘xf3 doesn't help due to 30...♖xf3 31.♕xf3 ♕xc2.

30...♗a4

All of White's forces are tied up.

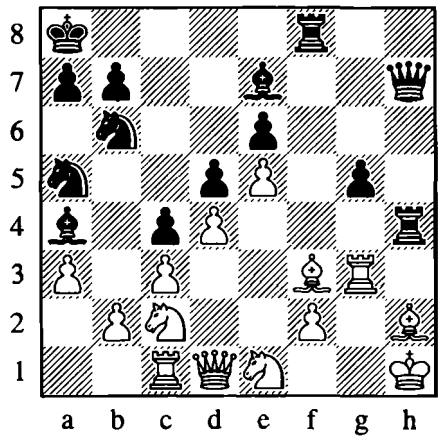
31.g5

Other choices are no better. For example: 31.♖g3 ♗h4 32.♖xf3 ♗xf2 33.♖xf8† ♖xf8 34.♕e2 ♗xe1–+

31...hxg5

The h-file will be fatal for White; he simply does not have sufficient space to reorganize his forces.

32.♖g3 ♖h8 33.♗g4 ♖h4 34.♖c1 ♕e4 35.♗xf3 ♕h7



White had to resign.

0–1

Final remarks

1. The ...c5-c4 advance by Black had to be combined with long castling, and works especially well if White is unable to open the b-file with b2-b3.
2. Once Black has castled long, White may still expand on the kingside, but there is a chance this plan could backfire as White's king can now become exposed.
3. Black's 17th move ..f5 was an extremely strong blow. If Black manages to combine ...c5-c4 with the ...f7-f5 advance, then he has obtained a significant spatial advantage and White is in serious trouble all over the board. It is no surprise that Black was able to win easily afterwards, as there is little White can do to prevent Black's active kingside play based on the ...g7-g5 expansion.

Geetha Narayanan Gopal – Viktor Bologan

Gibraltar 2012

Learning objectives:
1. This game illustrates how Black can challenge White's centre with the ...f7-f6 break.
2. Note how Black's bad bishop is actually very strong on the h7-b1 diagonal.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗e2 ♘e7 6.0–0 h6 7.♘bd2 ♗g6 8.♘b3 ♘d7 9.a4

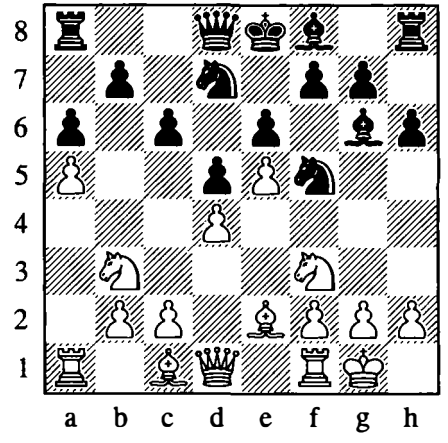
To me this approach seems artificial, but it is actually well justified. White intends to gain space on the queenside, and then either proceed to a kingside attack, or play c2-c4, to open the c-file.

9...♘f5

I could not find any games on my database with 9...a5 which intends to prevent a4-a5. Probably the reason is that after 10.♘h4 ♗h7 11.♗e3 Black will not be able to gain much from the usual ...c6-c5, due to the weakening of the b5-square.

10.a5 a6

This move may be necessary sooner or later, in order to prevent a5-a6.



11.♗d2

I would not dare to call this move a mistake, though it does not seem to contribute to White's plans.

More consistent was 11.c4!? ♗e7 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♗d3 and only now begin some kingside action after 13...0–0 14.g4 ♘h4 15.♘xh4 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♗xh4 17.♗d2 f5 18.h3 ♖f7 19.f4 when White had a tiny plus in Pogonina – Gunina, Russia 2012.

11...♗e7 12.g4 ♘h4 13.♘xh4 ♗xh4 14.f4

White's kingside actions are a little too rushed in my opinion, and Bologan finds the way to prove it.

14...♗e4!

A key move.

Less precise was 14...♗h7 which is answered by 15.f5 0–0 16.c4 when White has a small edge.

15.♗f3 ♗h7

As Bologan explains in his analysis, the idea behind ...♗g6-e4-h7 is to force White's bishop to move to the unfavourable f3-square, blocking his rook and requiring two tempos to arrive at the more desirable d3-square. Note the tremendous difference it makes for Black to have his light-squared bishop on h7, instead of the usual c8-square. This 'bad' bishop is actually very powerful when it is outside the pawn chain.

16.♗g2 0–0 17.f5

And this is the most critical moment in the game. White has pushed the f4-f5 break without much preparation. A premature break is usually met by undermining the control of White's centre, but how shall Black do so?

17...♖e8!

This is the best alternative. Instead of fighting against the base, Black will hit the front of the chain since the e5-pawn lacks sufficient support.

Black could also attempt to undermine the centre with 17...c5 18.♘xc5 ♘xc5 19.dxc5 ♕c7

but after 20.♗e3 ♕xe5 21.♗d4 ♕c7 22.b4 ♖ad8 23.fxe6 fxe6 24.♕e2 ♕d7 25.c3 White has a tiny plus, due to the blocking of the d5- and e6-pawns.

18.♔h1?

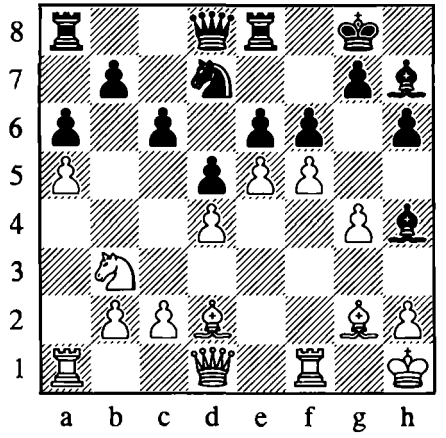
A routine move, allowing Black to take the lead.

It was necessary to play 18.♕e2 but Black has a pleasant choice between 18...♖c8, preparing ...c6-c5 and waiting for the right moment to push ...f7-f6, or simply 18...f6!? 19.fxe6 ♖xe6 20.c4 ♗e4 going into complications.

18.fxe6?! is weak after 18...♖xe6 since after ...f7-f6 Black's forces are much better prepared for the opening of the position.

18...f6!∓

This is quite a strong counter-break, unleashing Black's forces, while White's pieces are poorly coordinated.



19.♗c3

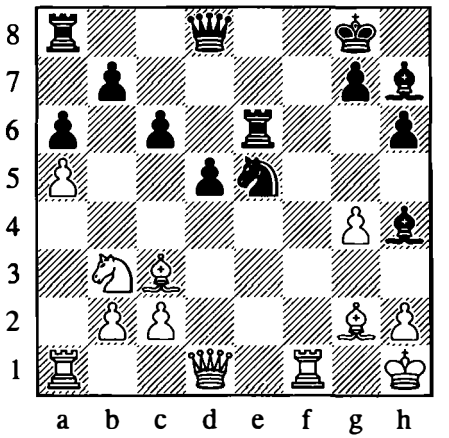
If 19.exf6 ♕xf6 20.♕f3 exf5 21.gxf5 the weak f5-pawn and the e-file are serious problems for White to cope with after: 21...♖e7 22.♗b4 ♖f7 23.♗h3 ♖e8∓

19.fxe6 was no better: 19...♖xe6 20.exf6 ♖xf6 White's pieces are just too poorly prepared to meet Black's threats. For example: 21.♗b4 ♖xf1† 22.♗xf1 ♕g5 23.♗d3 ♘f6 24.♗xh7† ♔xh7 25.♕d3† ♘e4 With an almost decisive advantage.

19...fxe5 20.fxe6

Somewhat better was 20.dxe5 but after 20...exf5 21.gxf5 ♘xe5 22.♘c5 ♗f6∓ there is little compensation for the pawn.

20...♖xe6 21.dxe5 ♘xe5∓



The game is essentially decided in Black's favour, as he is a pawn up and has the safer king. White resigned on move 41.

...0–1

Final remarks

1. By analogy with the game Karjakin – Carlsen from the previous chapter, the reader should note how White's kingside play is reduced to nothing once Black manages to play the ...f7-f6 break.
2. By analogy with the game Maze – Ni Hua from the previous chapter, Black's bishop was strong on the h7-b1 diagonal, as it was an obstacle to the f4-f5 break, provided protection to the kingside, and emerged as a powerful attacking piece once the f- and e-pawns came off the board.

Rashad Babaev – Vladimir Burmakin

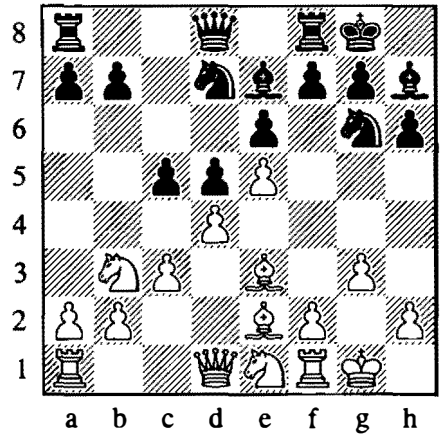
Balaguer 2006

Learning objective: The following game is an excellent example of playing the 'French' structure with Black (maybe choosing the Caro-Kann is a good start!). It brings together many of the ideas presented earlier in this chapter, and it is a good way to conclude our study of this structure. My comments are intentionally brief as most of the ideas have been explained earlier.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗e2 ♘d7 6.0–0 h6 7.♘bd2 ♗h7 8.c3 ♘e7 9.♘b3?!

Not the most effective move. Probably better was 9.b4!? to keep Black from playing ...c6-c5-c4 as in the game.

9...♘g6 10.♗e3 ♗e7 11.♘e1 0–0 12.g3 c5



13.h4

If 13.f4 c4 14.♘d2 b5 Black follows up as he did in the game, since the break 15.f5 (15.g4 is met by 15...f6!∓ with good kingside counterplay) 15...exf5 16.♖xf5 has no impact on Black's solid kingside.

As the reader will note, after ...c5xd4 White could easily protect the base of his pawn chain – the d4-pawn. Meanwhile, the kingside attack is not particularly threatening yet, thus Black decides to play:

13...c4!

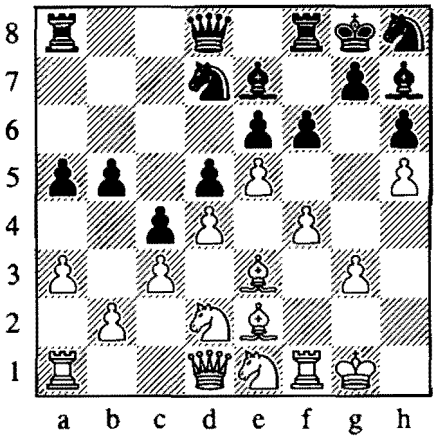
But not 13...cxd4? 14.cxd4± as Black will gain nothing from playing on the c-file, as we saw in the game Granda Zuniga – Narciso Dublan.

14.♘d2 b5 15.a3 a5

Black is ready to play ...b5-b4 to attack the c3-pawn, which is now the base of White's chain.

16.h5 ♘h8 17.f4 f6!∓

As we learned previously, Black neutralizes the kingside expansion with the ... f7-f6 break, which in this case also brings the h8-knight into the game via f7.



18.exf6?!

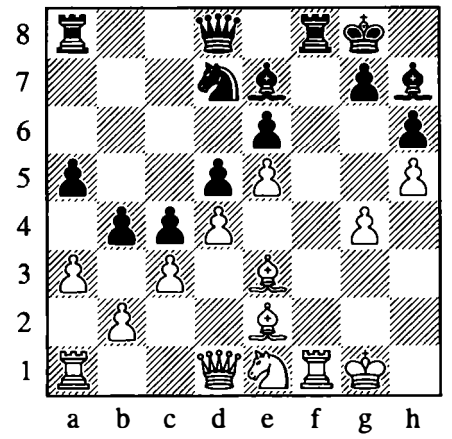
Turning into a French Type I momentarily.

Better was 18.♘g2 ♘f7 19.♗g4 (worse is 19.g4?! fxe5 20.fxe5 ♗g5∓ when White's kingside play is completely stuck) 19...♕b6 20.♘f3 ♗d3∓ and Black's position is promising, as he will break with ...b5-b4 to attack the vulnerable c3-pawn.

18...♘xf6 19.g4 ♘d7 20.♘df3 ♘f7 21.♘e5 ♘fxe5 22.fxe5

Now Black is back into a much improved French Type III structure as he got rid of his previously useless knight on h8, and can proceed with his plan.

22...b4!∓

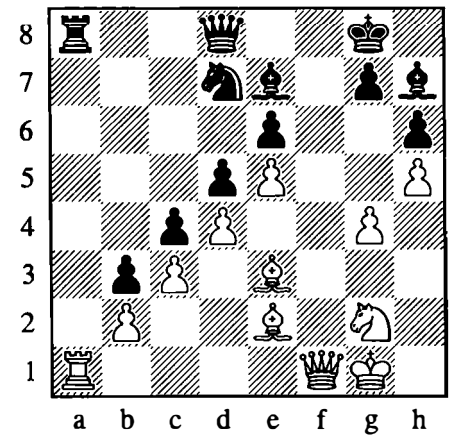


23.axb4 axb4

This is a good moment to observe what a wonderful position Black has, for the following reasons:

1. Black has completed his queenside plan with ...b7-b5-b4, and now he has a pleasant choice between ...bxc3 to create a vulnerable c3-pawn, or ...b4-b3 to later attack the even more vulnerable b2-pawn.
2. Black's 'bad' bishop is probably the most powerful bad bishop I have ever seen.
3. White's king is far more vulnerable than Black's, and his kingside structure is completely inflexible.

24.♘g2 ♖xf1† 25.♕xf1 b3!



Now everything comes down to whether Black can win the b2-pawn – and he can. So White's position is already hopeless.

26.♖xa8

Necessary to prevent 26...♖a2.

The try 26.♘f4 is met by the standard 26...♖a2! 27.♘xe6 ♕a5 28.♖xa2 bxa2 29.♕a1 ♗b1 and White is essentially a queen down.

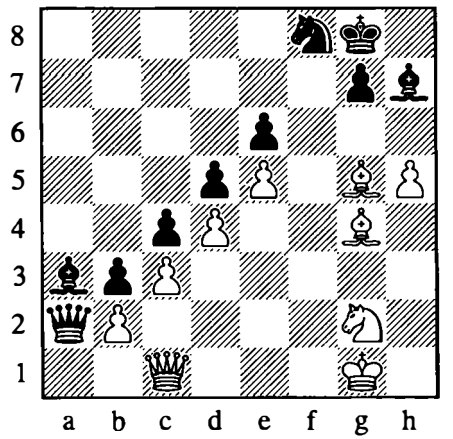
26...♕xa8 27.g5

A sign of desperation in an already lost position.

A passive defence such as 27.♕c1 was doomed after: 27...♕a2 28.♘f4 ♗a3!

27.♗c1 is met by 27...♕a1 28.♘f4 ♗g5 29.♔g2 ♗e4† 30.♔h3 ♕b1 when White is completely tied up and his position will soon collapse.

27...bxg5 28.♗g4 ♘f8 29.♕c1 ♕a2 30.♗xg5 ♗a3!–+



The triumph of Black's strategy; the promotion of the b-pawn is now unstoppable and the rest is easy.

31.h6

Of course 31.bxa3 b2 is the idea.

31...♕xb2 32.♕f4 ♕b1† 33.♔h2 ♕e4 34.♕g3 ♕g6 35.hxg7 ♕xg5 36.gxf8=♕† ♔xf8 37.♕f3† ♔e7 38.♗xe6 ♕h6† 39.♗h3 b2 40.♕xd5 b1=♕ 41.♕d7† ♔f8 42.♕c8† ♔g7 43.♕xc4 ♕f5
0–1

Final remarks

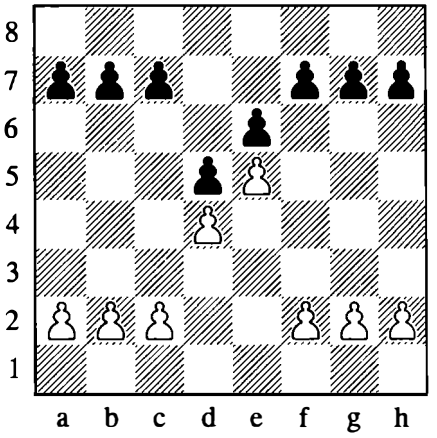
This game brought together many of the ideas learned throughout this chapter. Black did not capture with 13...cxd4 as the first game in the chapter showed us the c-file is not useful if the entry points are covered, as was the case here. Later, Black implemented the ...f7-f6 break to gain counterplay along the f-file and to prevent White from further advance, in similar style to Gopal – Bologan.

The ...f7-f6 break combined with having a bishop along the h7-b1 diagonal meant Black was able to stop White's kingside play altogether. This gave him time to pursue the complete chain-advance plan. The advance ...c5-c4 turned the c3-pawn into the base, while the advance ...b4-b3 turned White's b2-pawn into the base of the chain. The b2-pawn was harder to defend than the c3-pawn, which in turn was harder to defend than the d4-pawn. Since Black had time, he decided to go after the b2-pawn and he succeeded.

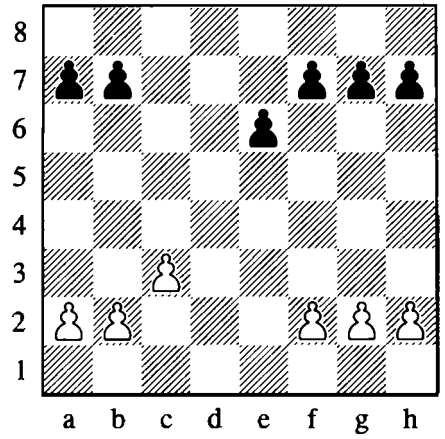
This game was a beautiful illustration of these concepts.

Chapter 22

Miscellaneous



The 3–3 vs. 4–2 Structure



The 3–3 vs. 4–2 structure is very common. It typically arises from the Caro-Kann or Slav structures studied in Chapters 3 and 4. In the Caro-Kann we obtain this structure once Black plays ...c5 and White captures dxc5. In the Slav it occurs after Black plays ...e5 and White replies dxe5. Note that in the second case we reach this structure with reversed colours. This structure may also arise from the Scheveningen Sicilian, as we will discuss later in this chapter. The fact that this position is open allows for massive piece exchanges and it is quite common for players of all levels to agree to a draw upon arriving at this structure, just because of its seemingly drawish nature. Nevertheless, both sides have some ambitious plans.

White's plans

1. Control the d-file and use it for a seventh-rank invasion if possible.
2. Pursue a *majority attack*. That is, advance the queenside pawns to create a passed pawn.

Black's plans

1. Control the d-file and use it for a seventh-rank invasion if possible.
2. Pursue a *minority attack* with ...a7-a5 and ...b7-b5-b4. If this plan is successful Black will probably eliminate White's a-, b-, and c-pawns using his a- and b-pawns. Thereupon Black will attempt to win an endgame with 4 vs. 3 kingside pawns.

Something to note is that both sides play on the queenside. This is quite logical since in the majority of cases the kings will be castled on the kingside. Attempting a kingside attack in such an open position is quite likely to backfire for either side. Of course there are exceptions to this rule, and an attack could succeed if pieces are already actively placed when we reach this structure. Nevertheless, I would not recommend starting a kingside attack from scratch as the opponent is likely to find a refutation in the centre or on the queenside.

Something to be aware of is that because this structure is quite open, the pair of bishops tends to be more important here than in other structures studied in this book. Overall, this structure is quite simple strategically speaking, but it is by no means drawish, and it is good to know how to proceed with either side.

Nguyen Van Huy – Le Quang Liem

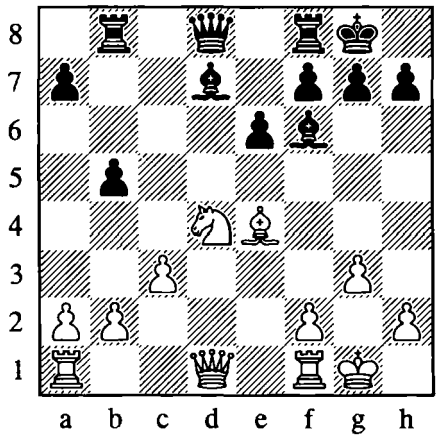
Ho Chi Minh City 2012

Learning objective: This game illustrates Black's minority attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 b5 5.0–0 ♘bd7 6.♗g5 ♗e7 7.♘bd2 c5 8.dxc5 ♘xc5

After White's unambitious opening, we have a Slav formation with reversed colours. White needs a central break to avoid being inferior.

9.♘d4 ♗d7 10.c3 0–0 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.e4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♗xe4 ♖b8∓



We have reached the structure of interest. Black is doing well for two reasons:

1. He has the pair of bishops in an open position.
2. His b5-pawn is ready for a minority attack; White will be unable to expand his queenside majority without it being weakened.

15.♕d3

Eliminating Black's bishop pair with 15.♘c6? ♗xc6 16.♗xc6 loses a pawn after 16...b4! 17.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 18.cxb4 ♖xb4∓ when the b2-pawn is lost.

15...h6 16.♖ad1

Of course 16.b3? (to create a passed pawn with c3-c4) is simply met by 16...♕c7 17.c4 bxc4 18.bxc4 ♖fc8∓ when the c4-pawn is a weakness and not a strength.

16...♕c7 17.a3 ♖fc8 18.♕f3

Without being able to expand, White can only run on the spot, waiting for Black to act.

Attempting kingside action with 18.f4 a5 19.f5 e5 does not help White, and after 20.♘c2 ♗c6!? 21.♘e3 b4! 22.♗xc6 ♕xc6 23.axb4 axb4 24.c4 ♗d8!∓ Black will follow up with ...♗b6 and White's king will become vulnerable.

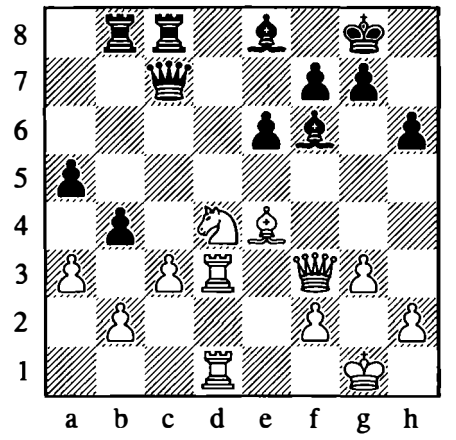
18...a5 19.♖d3?

White should have fought harder to avoid the ...b5-b4 break.

Better was 19.♘c2 ♗e8 20.♕e2 ♗e7∓ (or 20...♖d8!?) though the ...b5-b4 break will come sooner or later.

19...♗e8 20.♖fd1 b4!

The minority attack has been completed; White will be left with a weak pawn on the queenside.



21.axb4 axb4 22.cxb4 ♖xb4 23.♖c3

If 23.b3 ♕b6 24.♘e2 ♗g5!?∓ White must deal with the weak b3-pawn as well as his misplaced pieces; one threat is ...f5.

23...♕b8 24.♘c6 ♗xc6 25.♖xc6 ♖xc6 26.♗xc6 ♖xb2∓

The minority attack has succeeded, Black has gained a pawn and now he must try to win the 4 vs. 3 battle on the kingside.

27.♖a1?

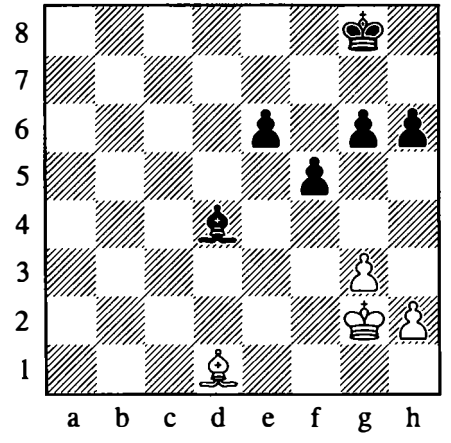
Did White want to trade rooks and queens even at the cost of a second pawn?

Better was 27.♖d7! ♕e5 28.♔g2 g6∓ though Black may make progress slowly.

27...♖xf2 28.♖a8 ♕xa8 29.♗xa8 ♖xf3 30.♗xf3

We have an opposite-coloured bishop endgame, but as it turns out, two connected pawns are often enough to win such an endgame as long as there are more pawns on the board.

30...♗d4† 31.♔g2 g6 32.♗d1 f5



33.h4

Another try was:

33.g4 ♔f7 34.gxf5 gxf5 35.♔f3 e5 36.♗c2

Attempting to build a fortress and sacrifice the bishop for two pawns when needed:

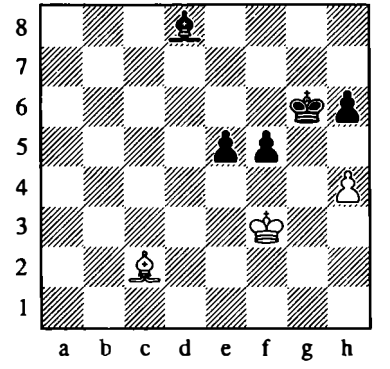
36...♔f6

Of course not 36...e4†? 37.♗xe4 fxe4† 38.♔xe4 which is a theoretical draw, because the bishop is on squares of the wrong colour.

37.♗d3 ♔g5 38.♗c2 ♗a7! 39.h4†

Or 39.♗b1 e4†! 40.♗xe4 fxe4† 41.♔xe4 ♔g4 and Black wins.

39...♔g6 40.♗b1 ♗b6 41.♗c2 ♗d8!



This is the key.

42.h5† ♔g5 43.♗b1 ♗b6 44.♗c2 e4† 45.♗xe4 fxe4† 46.♔xe4 ♔g4!

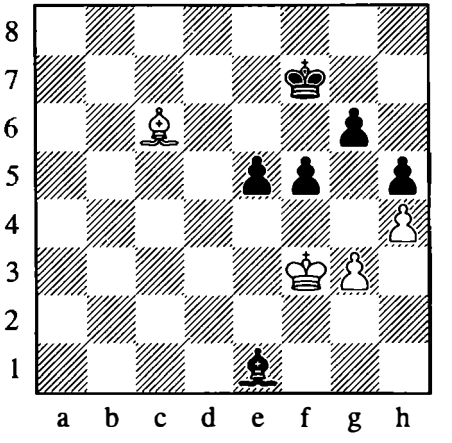
But not 46...♔xh5?? 47.♔f3 and draws.

47.♔d3 ♔xh5 48.♔e2 ♔g4 49.♔f1 ♔f3

And Black wins.

33...h5 34.♗a4 ♔f7 35.♔f3 ♗b6 36.♗b5 ♗a5 37.♗c6 ♗e1 38.♔f4 e5† 39.♔f3

Or 39.♔xe5 ♗xg3† 40.♔d5 ♗xh4 and wins.

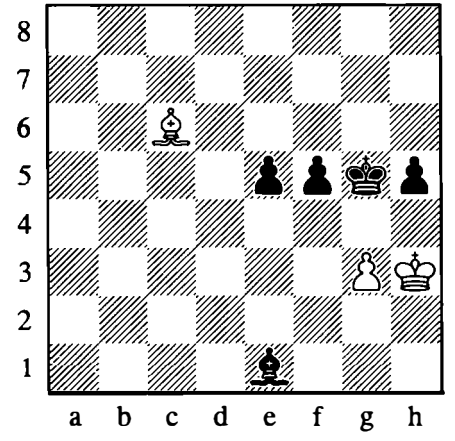


39...g5!

Now Black wraps up the game very nicely.

40.hxg5 ♔g6 41.♔g2 ♔xg5 42.♔h3

Also hopeless is 42.♗d5 e4! 43.♗c6 h4 44.gxh4† ♗xh4.



42...h4! 43.gxh4† ♗xh4

Even though there are only two pawns left, Black is winning because White does not have enough time to set up the standard defence with ♔f3 and ♗d3.

44.♔g2 e4 45.♔f1 ♔f6 46.♔e2 ♔e5 47.♗e8 f4

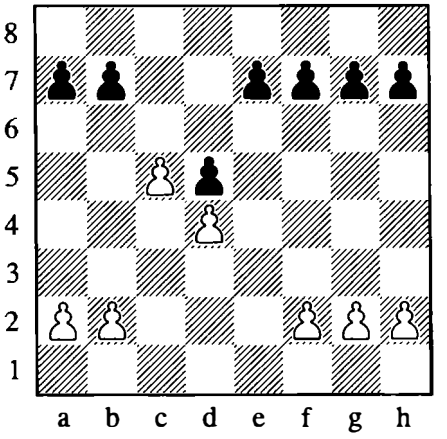
White resigns. 48.♗h5 is inadequate as 48...♔f5! places White in zugzwang: 49.♔d2 f3 50.♔e3 ♗g5† 51.♔f2 ♔f4–+

0–1

Final remarks

1. Black's bishop pair proved very useful, as White had no entry points on the d-file and could not create counterplay with it.
2. A red flag for White should have been the b5-pawn, which hinted that a queenside expansion would not be achievable hence White should stay passive.
3. White's biggest problem in this game was his rather questionable opening, which left him fighting for equality from the very beginning. Black's play was impeccable.

The Panov Structure



When you see the name 'Panov Structure' you might guess IQP, but instead I shall give this name to the structure you can see above, which usually originates from the Panov variation of the Caro-Kann after 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 when White later plays c4-c5. This structure may also arise from the Queen's Indian Defence, as well as any position with a Carlsbad structure.

White's plans

The main plan is clear: create a passed pawn on the queenside. If White is able to play b2-b4-b5 and later c5-c6, then he is likely to have a big advantage.

Black's plans

Black can counter this plan with two different approaches:

1. Attack the front of White's chain (the c5-pawn) with ...b7-b6. This is done in order to trade the c5-pawn, eliminating White's most dangerous threat.
2. Attack the base of the chain (the d4-pawn) by placing a knight on c6 and a bishop on f6. This is often combined with playing ...f7-f5 and placing a strong knight on e4.

Black's Plans 1 and 2 can often be combined effectively. Overall the Panov structure is a relatively simple one, though we should know its basic plans. Here I present a couple of short fragments to illustrate how White creates a passed pawn, how Black fights for counterplay, and then we finish our discussion with an example of how a Carlsbad structure is converted into a Panov.

Alexey Dreev – Ivan Galic

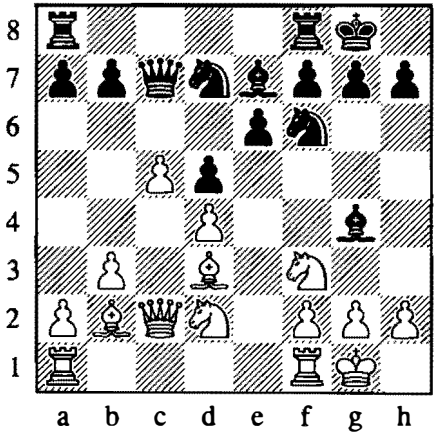
Kallithea 2008

Learning objective: This game illustrates how White's queenside majority can be advanced to dominate the game.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕b3 ♕b6 5.♕c2 ♗g4 6.♘bd2 ♘bd7 7.e3 e6 8.♗d3 c5 9.b3 ♗e7 10.♗b2 ♕c7 11.0–0 cxd4 12.exd4 0–0?!

Instead 12...dxc4!? 13.bxc4 0–0 gives Black a playable hanging-pawns position.

13.c5!±



We obtain the structure of interest under excellent conditions for White because:

1. Black's ...b7-b6 plan does not work in view of c5-c6 (or b3-b4). Either way, White preserves his strong pawn.
2. Black is unable to exert pressure against the d4-pawn, as he cannot place a bishop on f6, or a knight on c6, or a knight on e4.

I seriously question whether Black considered these factors when accepting this structure, as now he is stuck with a very passive position.

13...♗h5

White has a big advantage after: 13...b6?! 14.c6! ♖fc8 15.♘e5 ♗h5 16.♖ac1 ♘f8 17.♗a6±

13...a5 14.a3± does not prevent White from advancing b3-b4-b5.

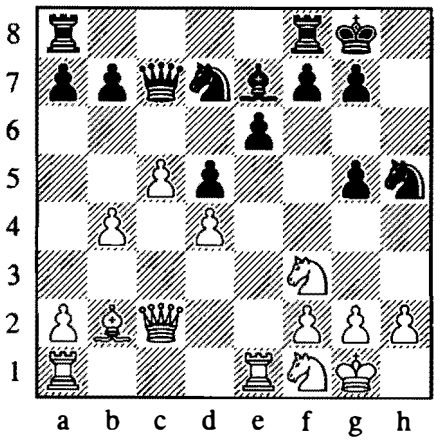
14.b4 ♗g6

Black trades his bad bishop, but in this structure this factor is not so important.

15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♖fe1 ♘h5 17.♘f1 g5?!

This is more weakening than threatening.

If 17...♖ac8 18.b5 ♘df6 19.♘e3 ♖fe8 20.a4± Black lacks useful moves while White is preparing to create a powerful passed pawn.

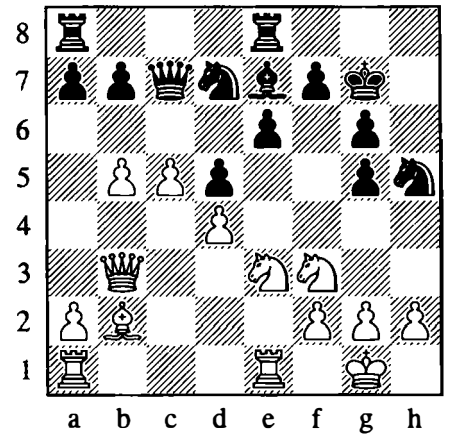


18.♘e3

Threatening ♘xd5.

18...♖fe8 19.♕b3 g6 20.b5 ♔g7

20...a6 21.a4 ♔g7 22.♖ac1± is similar to the game.



21.♖ac1±

White can create a passed pawn any minute now. Notice how Black is still unable to create any play.

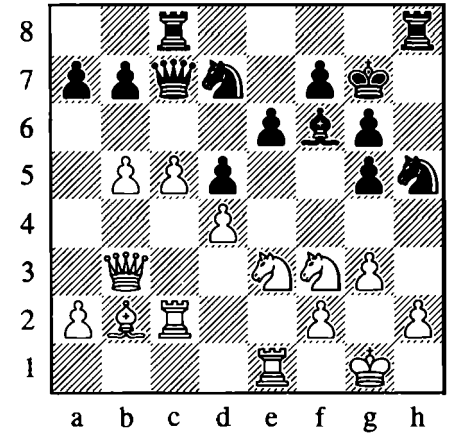
21...♗f6 22.g3!

Restricting the knight on h5.

22...♖h8 23.♖c2

The advance 23.c6?! bxc6 24.bxc6 ♘b6 seems premature; it is not clear how to make progress from here.

23...♖ac8

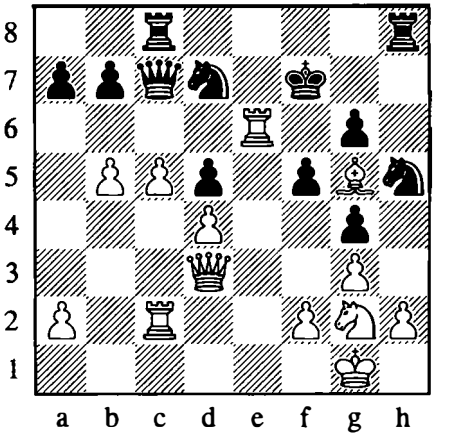


24.♗c1!

As it turns out, White does not need to take decisive action on the queenside. His pawn majority is already a big distraction, and now White will direct his efforts against the weak g5-pawn.

24...♗d8 25.♕d3 f5 26.♘g2 g4 27.♘g5 ♗xg5 28.♗xg5 ♔f7 29.♖xe6!+–

We have reached a rather unexpected finish. Nevertheless, White's queenside strategy was a clear success and if Black had not weakened his kingside, then White could have easily won with a well-prepared c5-c6 advance. Here White has obtained a decisive attack and the game finished with:

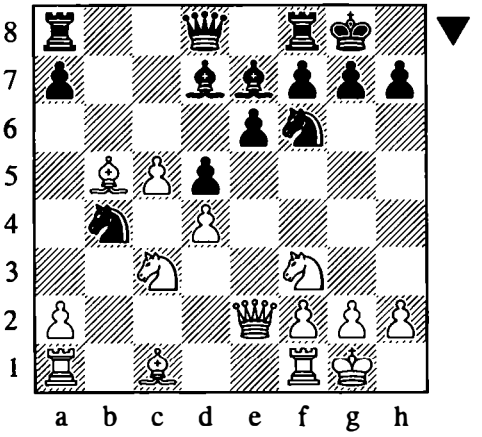


29...♔xe6 30.♖e2† ♔f7 31.♖e7† ♔g8 32.♕e3 ♖h7 33.♕e6† ♔h8 34.♘h4 ♖g8 35.♘xg6† ♖xg6 36.♖e8†
1–0

Final remarks

1. Black's biggest mistake was accepting a Panov structure without counterplay. It was necessary to realize that neither ...b7-b6 nor attacking the d4-pawn would work well.
2. The reader should notice how Black essentially had no useful moves while White could advance his queenside majority and prepare the creation of a passed pawn. Also, it is noteworthy that White did not just push c5-c6 as soon as it became possible. Rather, it is important to prepare this move so that the pawn will not become stuck on c6, unable to advance further.

Black's counterplay against the d4-pawn



The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Getz – Istratescu**, Oslo 2013. Black began to obtain counterplay with:

13...♘e4!

The first part of the plan; this knight disrupts White's coordination.

14.♗b2

But not: 14.♘xe4? dxe4 15.♗xd7 (or 15.♘e5 ♗xb5 16.♕xb5 ♕xd4∓) 15...exf3 16.♕c4 ♕xd7 17.♕xb4 fxg2∓

14...♗xb5 15.♘xb5 ♘c6

The second part in Black's plan, pressuring the d4-pawn.

16.♘c3 f5!

Now the third part, supporting the knight on e4 and preparing the last part of the plan: ...♗f6 with substantial pressure on d4.

17.♘xe4

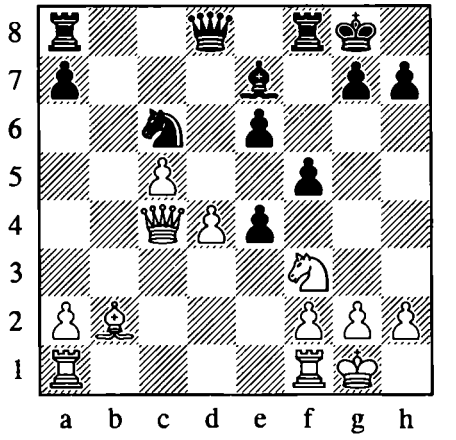
If 17.♖ab1 ♗f6 18.♖fd1 ♕d7 19.♗a1 ♖ab8 and Black is at least equal.

17...dxe4

17...fxe4!? was promising too, for example 18.♘d2 ♖b8 19.♗c3 e5!? 20.♘b3 exd4 21.♘xd4 ♕d7∓ when the c5-pawn is very weak.

18.♕c4

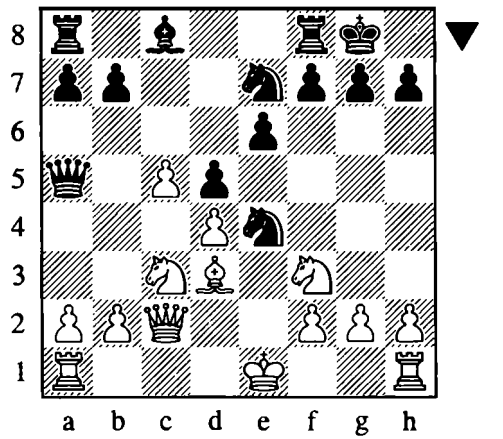
Or: 18.♖fd1 ♕d5! (but not 18...exf3? 19.♕xe6† ♔h8 20.♕xc6±) 19.♘e5 ♘xe5 20.dxe5 ♕xc5∓



18...♕d5! 19.♕xd5 exd5 20.♘e1 ♖ab8 21.♗c3 ♗f6 22.♘c2 f4∓

Black had a very promising position and eventually won the game.

Black's ...b7-b6 counterplay

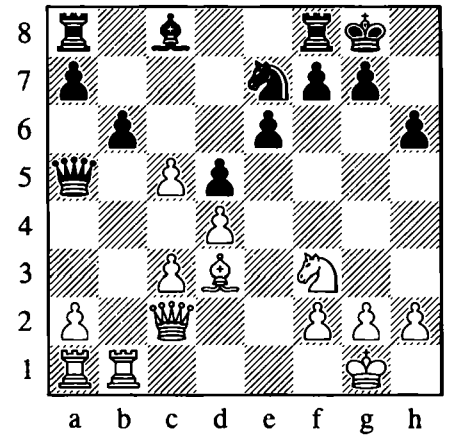


The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Klundt – Dautov**, Bad Wiessee 2001. In order to avoid the long-term problems Black faced in Dreev – Galic, Black modified the structure immediately with:

12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 h6 14.0–0 b6!

This is the key; now Black is rid of his backward b7-pawn and forces White to have a backward c3-pawn.

15.♖fb1



15...♗a6

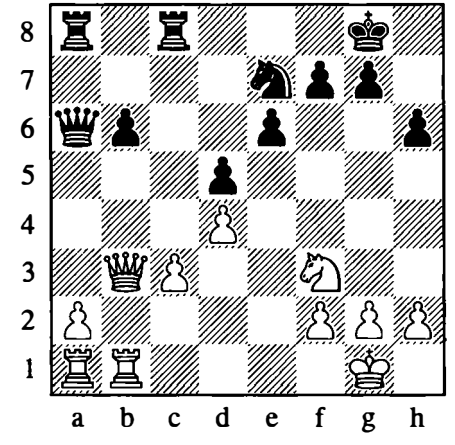
If light-squared bishops are off the board, then even better!

But not 15...bxc5?! 16.♖b5 ♕c7 17.♖xc5 ♕d6 18.♖b1 as White is a little better coordinated.

16.♗xa6 ♕xa6 17.cxb6?!

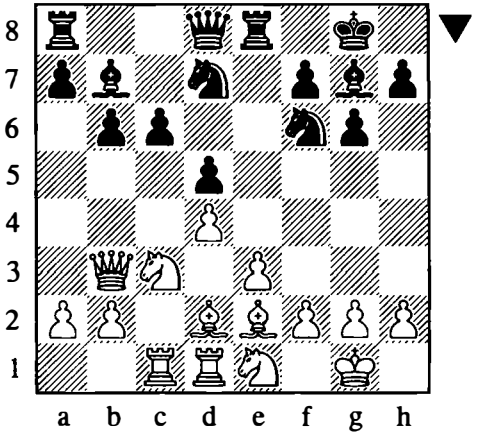
Imprecise. Better was 17.♘e5! ♖fc8 (or 17...bxc5!? 18.♘d7 cxd4 19.♘xf8 d3 20.♕d2 ♖xf8⩲) 18.♘d3= when it is hard for Black to pressure the c3-pawn.

17...axb6 18.♕b3 ♖fc8∓



Black is better as both the c3- and a2-pawns are clear targets. This kind of position is exactly what Black is looking for when he plays the ...b7-b6 break. White's once-powerful queenside majority is now just a weakness.

Converting a Carlsbad into a Panov structure



The position in the diagram occurred in the game **Rahman – Areshchenko**, Chennai 2011. If play develops slowly, Black could find himself in an inferior version of the Carlsbad because his c6-pawn is weakened, as he has already played ...b7-b6. Thus Black takes a good opportunity to transform the structure with:

13...c5! 14.♗f3?!

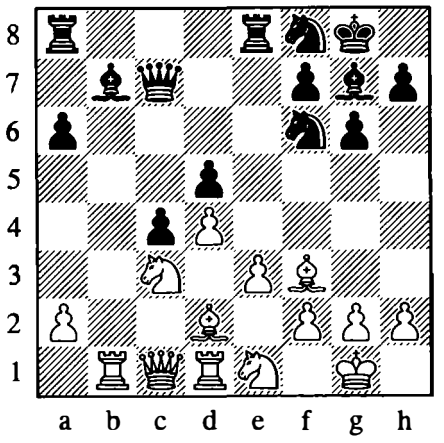
The greater of two evils.

If 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♕c2 (or 15.♕a3 ♗f8!?∓) 15...♖c8 16.♘f3 a6 17.♗e1 b5∓ Black has a very comfortable isolani.

14...c4!

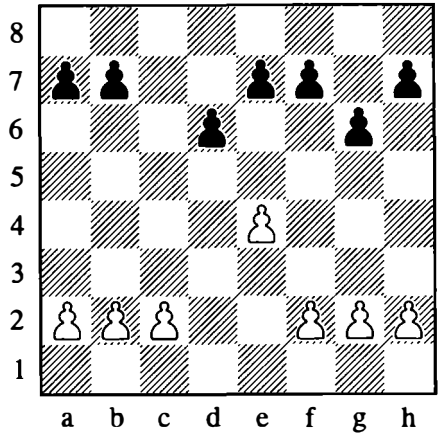
Of course, Black obtains a good position similar to the game Dreev – Galic, as White is unable to find good counterplay. Notice how bad the knight is on e1. The game continued:

15.♕c2 a6 16.b3 b5 17.bxc4 bxc4 18.♖b1 ♕c7 19.♕c1 ♘f8!∓



Black has a very pleasant position; he is preparing ...♘e6-g5. Black eventually won, though this is not particularly relevant to us. What we have learned is how a Carlsbad structure can transpose into a Panov structure.

The Dragon Formation



The Dragon Formation arises almost exclusively from the Dragon or Accelerated Dragon lines of the Sicilian. It may also occur with reversed colours when White plays the English Opening and Black replies with 1...e5 followed by 2...♘f6 and 3...d5. Assuming we have the structure with colours the usual way around (say, from a Dragon) then Black almost always castles short while White must choose whether to castle short or long. This decision has a significant influence on the character of the resulting game.

White's plans

1. If White castles long, then he will assault Black's kingside with h2-h4-h5, and then attempt a mating attack along the h-file.
2. If White castles short, then he will play a central strategy, place a rook on the d-file and a knight on d5.

Black's plans

1. If White castles long, then Black must create a queenside attack at all costs. Black will often play along the c-file as well as push his a- and b-pawns. An exchange sacrifice ...♖xc3, with the idea of doubling pawns, is often possible.
2. If White castles short, then Black can play a more positional game along the c-file. Place a knight on c4, and again the idea of an exchange sacrifice with ...♖xc3 may be possible.

Something to note about White's Plan 2 is that if Black captures the knight on d5 with a piece, and White recaptures with exd5, then the structure is very similar to the asymmetric transformation of the Maroczy, which we studied in Chapter 11.

After such a brief overview, many readers may wonder if the infamous Dragon is really *that simple*. The truth is that this structure often yields extremely complex positions, but the complexity is mostly tactical. There are few strategic elements to discuss, as most games are decided by brutal tactical shots. This is the reason I decided not to give a separate chapter to this structure. Nevertheless, one interesting idea in this structure is Black's exchange sacrifice on c3, and we will see an example of it.

Zbynek Hracek – Miso Cebalo

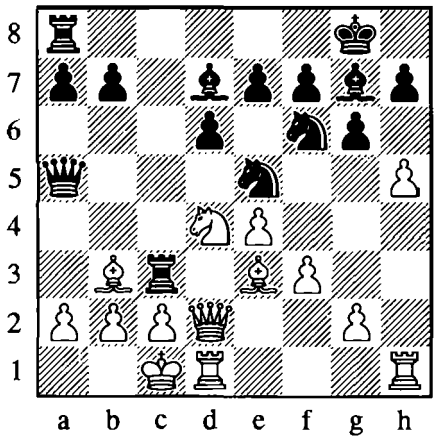
Medulin 2002

Learning objective: This game illustrates the power of Black's exchange sacrifice ...♖xc3.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 cxd4 5.♘xd4 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.♗c4 ♗d7 10.0–0–0 ♕a5

The line 10...♖c8 11.♗b3 ♘e5 12.♔b1 ♘c4 13.♗xc4 ♖xc4 is far more common.

11.♗b3 ♖fc8 12.h4 ♘e5 13.h5 ♖xc3!?



14.bxc3?!

We are essentially outside of theory, though the exchange sacrifice is a very typical resource in this opening. White has to deal with the burden of the doubled c-pawns, which in many variations prevent him from carrying out a decisive kingside attack. The sacrifice is positionally and tactically well justified.

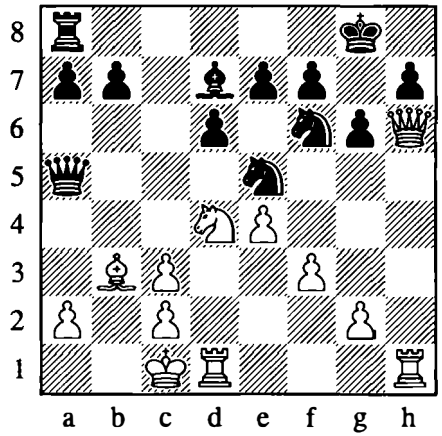
If 14.♕xc3 ♕xc3 15.bxc3 ♘xh5 16.g4 ♘f6 there are no weaknesses for White to attack, for example 17.♗h6 a5 18.a3 ♖c8 19.♔b2 b5 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.♖h4 h5!? when Black is rock-solid.

However, instead of 16.g4, the direct 16.♘f5! opens up the position favourably after 16...gxf5 17.♖xh5 fxe4 18.♗d5 exf3 19.gxf3± when Black is still in the game, but he does not quite have a fortress anymore.

14...♘xh5 15.♗h6 ♗xh6 16.♕xh6 ♘f6!

Preventing a potential ♖xh5 sacrifice.

Instead 16...♕xc3 could be met by 17.♘e2! ♕c5 18.♖xh5! gxh5 19.♖h1 and the attack forces Black to give up a piece with 19...♘g4 20.fxg4 ♗xg4 21.♘f4 when White should be able to win this.



17.♔b2?!

If 17.g4 ♕xc3 18.♔b1 (but not 18.g5?? ♕a1†! 19.♔d2 ♕xd4†–+) 18...♖c8 19.♘f5!? (again not 19.g5? ♘h5 20.♖xh5 gxh5 21.♖h1 ♕xd4 22.♕xh5 ♘c4 23.♕xh7† ♔f8–+) 19...♗xf5 20.exf5 ♘c4 21.♕c1 ♕xf3∓ when Black has three pawns for the exchange and his king is quite safe.

Better was 17.♔b1! and after 17...♕xc3 18.♘e2 if Black chooses 18...♕c5 19.♘f4!± the threat of 20.♘d5 gets Black into serious trouble. Instead 18...♕c8! 19.♘f4 ♕f8 gives Black a solid position.

Also plausible is 17.♘e2!? to follow up with ♘f4-d5.

17...♖c8 18.♕e3?!

What is interesting about Black's exchange

sacrifice is that White is unable to hold his queenside through passive defence.

Better was 18.♔b1! and after 18...♖c5 19.♘e2 ♗b5 20.♘f4 White can create some threats too.

18...♕c5 19.♖h4 a5!∓

White is already in big trouble, as his bishop is misplaced and his king unsafe.

20.♖dh1

20.a3 is answered by: 20...a4 21.♗a2 ♗e6! Gaining the crucial c4-square. 22.♗xe6 (not 22.♘xe6?? ♕xe3) 22...fxe6 White is almost lost already.

20...e6?!

A logical move, though ignoring an immediately winning option.

Instead 20...a4! wins on the spot, say after 21.♖xh7 ♘xh7 22.♕h6 e6 23.♕xh7† ♔f8.

21.a4

Better was 21.a3 though 21...a4 22.♗a2 ♖c6!∓ followed by ...♖c6 gives good attacking chances.

21...b5!

Opening the position decisively.

21...♗xa4!?∓ was strong too.

22.axb5 a4 23.♗a2

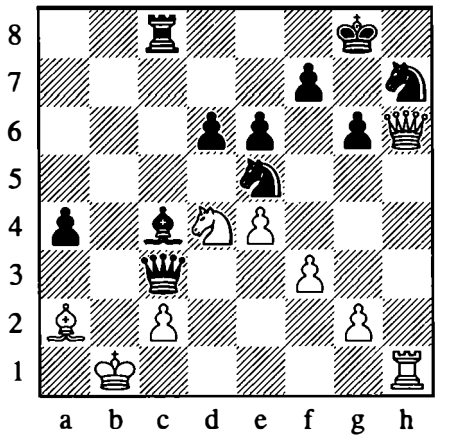
23.♗xa4?? ♘c4† is all over.

23...♗xb5 24.♖xh7?

Desperation.

More stubborn was 24.♔a1 though after 24...♗c4! 25.♖b1 ♕a3 26.♖b2 the appearance of White's position speaks for itself. Black has many promising alternatives such as 26...♘fd7 27.♖h1 ♖b8 28.♖hb1 ♖b6!∓ keeping White's pieces completely tied down to the defence.

24...♘xh7 25.♕h6 ♕xc3† 26.♔b1 ♗c4–+



Black has a bulldozing attack while White is unable to even create a serious threat. The rest is simple.

27.♕xh7† ♔f8 28.♗xc4

Or 28.♕h8† ♔e7 29.♕xc8 loses to 29...♗xa2† 30.♔xa2 ♕xc8.

28...♖xc4 29.♕h4

Threatening ♕d8-h8#.

29...♔e8! 30.♕f6 ♔d7 31.♖h8 ♖c8 32.♖xc8 ♔xc8 33.♘e2 ♕b4†

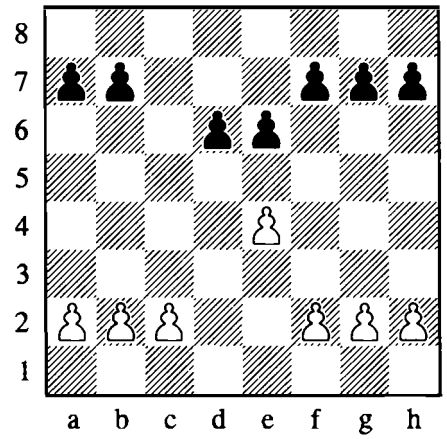
White resigns due to unavoidable mate.

0–1

Final remarks

1. Black's exchange sacrifice on c3 created a serious distraction, preventing White from focusing on his kingside attack.
2. Once White took on a defensive role to protect the doubled c-pawns, the game was practically won for Black, as there are no threats on the kingside while Black's queenside play keeps on rolling. White's queenside is so seriously damaged by the doubled c-pawns that White is unable to organize an effective defence.
3. It is important to note the key role being played by Black's knight on e5, which covers many essential squares and prevents White's attack from succeeding.

The Scheveningen Structure



The Scheveningen structure is one of the most exciting and complicated pawn structures in chess. This structure can arise from almost every variation of the Sicilian, such as the Najdorf, Scheveningen, Classical, Paulsen, Taimanov and many other less prominent lines. Of course, this structure also arises very often in the English Opening with colours reversed when Black pays 1...e5 followed by 2...♘f6 and 3...d5.

White's plans

1. Launch a kingside attack with g2-g4-g5, h2-h4-h5 and then break with g5-g6.
2. Play f2-f4-f5 to pressure the e6-pawn and create an attack along the a2-g8 diagonal.
3. Play f2-f4 and then e4-e5 and then later carry out a kingside attack.

Black's plans

1. Achieve the central break ...d6-d5 to release the position and activate his minor pieces.
2. Play along the c-file, and place a knight on c4 to pressure the b2-pawn and undermine White's knight which is typically located on c3.
3. If White has castled long, then carry out a queenside attack with ...b7-b5-b4, ...a7-a5-a4 and then the break ...b4-b3.
4. If White plays f2-f4, in some cases Black can reply ...g7-g5 to fight for the control of the e5-square.
5. In some cases Black may sacrifice an exchange on c3, in similar style to what we saw in the Dragon structure.

Black will most likely castle short or on some occasions keep the king in the centre. Meanwhile, White's king must choose between long and short castling, which will greatly influence the development of the game. If White castles long, then his main lines plans will be 1 and 2 while Black will most probably focus on Plan 3. Instead, if White castles short, Black will focus on Plan 1 while White can still carry out a kingside attack. White's Plan 3 is more likely to work after short castling, because the rooks would be placed more favourably for this plan.

Structure transformations

This structure can transpose into some of the structures we have studied previously.

1. If Black plays ...d6-d5 and White replies with e4-e5 then we obtain a French Type II structure (Chapter 15).
2. If Black plays ...d6-d5, White captures e4xd5 and Black recaptures with a piece, then we obtain a 3–3 vs. 4–2 structure.
3. If White plays f2-f4-f5, the pressure on e6 may provoke Black to play ...e6-e5 obtaining a Najdorf Type II structure (Chapter 9).
4. On some occasions White may play c2-c4 arriving at a Hedgehog structure (Chapter 10).

The second structure transformation above is often favourable for Black on a positional level. The reason is that Black often has his b-pawn already on b5, which is the starting point of Black's minority attack, as described earlier in this chapter.

The 4th structure transformation is quite unlikely to work because White typically has his knight

on c3 and cannot afford to move it away in order to play c2-c4.

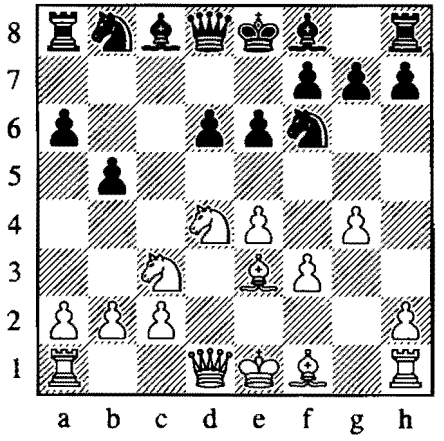
Overall the Scheveningen is a very interesting pawn structure and deserves study. The reason I do not cover it in more detail is because the strategic ideas in this structure are relatively simple while most of its complexity comes from tactical details which do not fit so well with the content of this book. I am a firm believer that the reader needs most help with strategic concepts, as tactical shots can readily be studied using the ever more powerful computer engines. Here we will see only one example of White's attack once Black plays ...d6-d5 with the king still in the centre. Then we will see a brief discussion of Black's Plan 4.

Mauricio Flores Rios – Rodrigo Vasquez

Reno (rapid) 2007

Learning objective: This game is an example of the sharp complications that may arise after Black's ...d6-d5 break.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e6 7.f3 b5 8.g4



The purpose of this early g2-g4 (instead of 8.♕d2) is to provoke:

8...h6

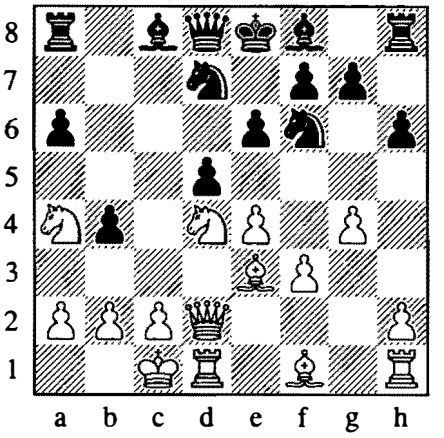
This move can be weakening in some cases.

9.♕d2 ♘bd7 10.0–0–0

My database has over two hundred GM-level games in this position. Black decides to go for the sharp continuation:

10...b4 11.♘a4 d5!?

Achieving the standard ...d6-d5 break, but while Black's king is still in the centre.



12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♗c4!

White is playing aggressively and maximum precision is required. If Black manages to stabilize his position and castle, then he is probably going to take the lead.

13...♗b7 14.♖he1 ♕a5?

An overly optimistic move.

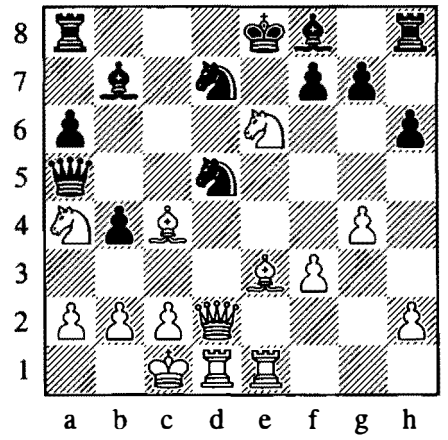
The careless 14...♘xe3? loses after 15.♘xe6! fxe6 16.♗xe6 ♗c6 17.♕xe3.

Safer was 14...♘7f6 15.g5 hxg5 16.♗xg5 though after 16...♗e7 as in Negi – David, Belgium 2012, then 17.♘xe6! fxe6 18.♖xe6 gives White a promising position since 18...0–0 is met by 19.♕e2! ♖f7 20.♗xf6 ♗xf6 21.♘b6 winning a decisive amount of material.

15.♘xe6!!+–

This was only a twenty-minute game and I could not calculate much; all I knew was that the nature of the position called for an aggressive move like this one, preserving the initiative.

If 15.♗b3? 0–0–0∞ Black is comfortable and White no longer has clear targets to attack.



15...fxe6 16.♗b6!

Attacking e6 while covering the d8-square, thus preventing Black's king from escaping with ...0–0–0.

So of course not 16.♗f2? 0–0–0.

16...♕xa4

White is also winning after: 16...♘7xb6 17.♖xe6† ♗e7 (or 17...♔d7 18.♘xb6† ♔xe6 19.♘xd5+–; 17...♔f7 18.♖xb6+–) 18.♘xb6 0–0 (or 18...♘xb6 19.♖xe7†! ♔xe7 20.♕d6† ♔e8 21.♕e6† ♔f8 22.♕f7#) 19.♖xe7 ♕xb6 20.♖xb7!

16...♘5xb6 17.♖xe6† ♗e7 18.♘xb6 transposes to the variation above.

17.♗xd5 ♗e7

17...♘xb6 is met decisively by: 18.♖xe6† ♗e7 19.♖xe7†! ♔xe7 20.♕e3† ♔d7 21.♕xb6 ♗xd5 22.♖xd5†

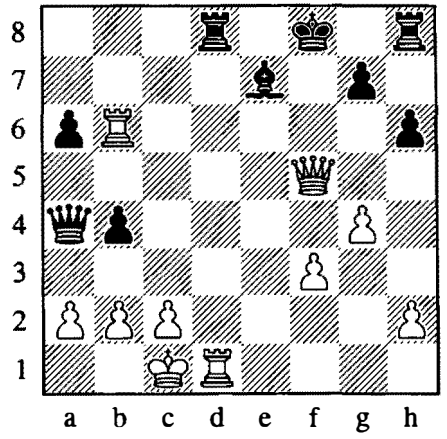
18.♖xe6 ♗xd5

Again 18...♘xb6 loses to 19.♖xe7†! as above.

19.♕xd5 ♘xb6

If 19...♖c8 20.♖xe7†! ♔xe7 21.♖e1† White has a forced mate, for example: 21...♔f8 22.♗c5† ♘xc5 23.♕f5† ♔g8 24.♕xc8† ♔h7 25.♕f5† ♔g8 26.♖e7!

20.♖xb6 ♖d8 21.♕h5† ♔f8 22.♕f5†



22...♔g8

Or 22...♔e8 23.♕g6†! ♔f8 24.♖xd8† ♗xd8 25.♖b7 forcing mate.

23.♖xd8† ♗xd8 24.♕d5† ♔h7 25.♕d3†

Quicker and nicer was: 25.♖xh6†! ♔xh6 (25...gxh6 26.♕f7#) 26.♕h5#

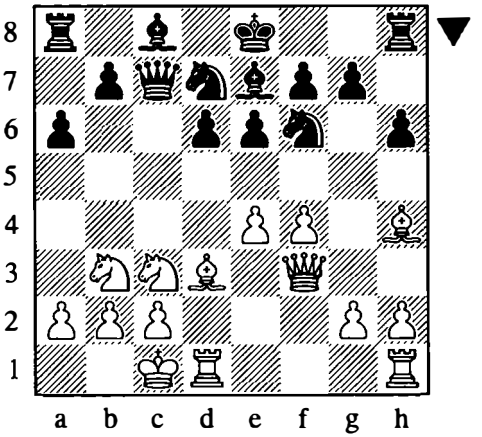
After 25.♕d3† Black resigned because he is losing a rook after 25...♔g8 26.♕xd8† ♔h7 27.♕d3† ♔g8 28.♖b8† ♔f7 29.♖xh8.

1–0

Final remarks

It is dangerous for Black to carry out the ...d6-d5 break before castling. The resulting position is rather complicated, but seems favourable to White as long as he is ready to sacrifice material when appropriate.

Black's ...g7-g5 break



The position in the diagram occurred in Leko – Anand, Leon 2001. We have a complex position with multiple options and now Black decided to go for the sharp yet positionally sound:

12...g5!

The idea of this move is to get rid of White's f4-pawn in order for Black's knight to occupy e5.

13.♗f2

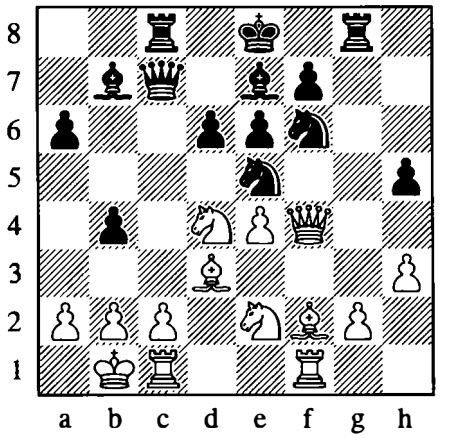
If 13.fxg5 ♘e5! note that Black did not really sacrifice anything, since he is going to regain the pawn after: 14.♕e2 ♘fd7 15.♗g3 (15.♕d2 is met by 15...b5∞ as there is no hurry to take on g5, due to the pin) 15...hxg5 With an excellent position for Black.

A critical move was 13.e5!? gxh4 14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.♖he1 when the resulting position is quite complicated, but Black seems to be doing at least okay. For example, 15..♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘f6∞ to be followed by ...♗d7 and ...0–0–0.

13...gxf4 14.♕xf4 b5 15.♔b1 b4 16.♘e2 ♗b7 17.♖hf1 ♘e5

Every Sicilian player dreams about having such a knight installed on e5. This knight contributes to both attack and defence, covering many essential squares.

18.h3 h5 19.♘bd4 ♖c8 20.♖c1 ♖g8∓

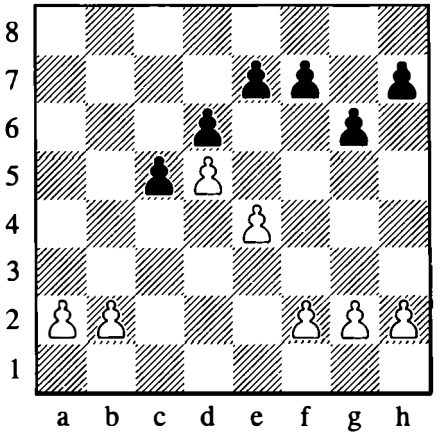


We have reached a very interesting position that deserves some comment. Black has achieved everything one hopes for with the ...g7-g5 break; let's spell this out:

1. Black has a colossal knight on e5, which essentially dominates the game.
2. Black is able to make good use of two half-open files (c and g) while White cannot easily do similar, especially with the d-file so cluttered.
3. White's e4-pawn is isolated and vulnerable. Meanwhile, the bishop on d3 is close to useless.

Something to note is that Black's king stayed in the centre, which is by no means a problem. In fact it is a standard approach in Scheveningen structures, especially after Black has installed a knight on e5, which ensures the safety of the king. Black has a great position, and White blundered just two moves later, so we will leave our analysis at this point, though the reader is encouraged to analyze this position and convince himself of Black's superiority.

The Benko Structure



This structure is actually specific to the Benko variation which begins with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6. After the a6-pawn drops, Black is a pawn down but has some positional advantages to compensate for it. They are:

1. White has two pawn "islands", while Black only has one rock-solid group of six pawns.
2. Black will place his rooks on the a- and b-files, pressuring White's a- and b-pawns, preventing their advance.
3. White does not have obvious targets and may have to limit himself to passive play for a long time in order to stabilize his position.

Theory regards the Benko Gambit as being somewhat inferior, and in fact it is rarely seen at the elite level nowadays. Nevertheless, it is an excellent practical weapon to be used when one absolutely needs to win with Black. Now, a big question is: How should White play?

There are two main strategies to be followed, and they are often combined:

1. White must turn his queenside pawns into a fortress, which most probably will be on b3 and a4, combined with many minor pieces surrounding and defending these pawns.

2. Advance in the centre and obtain a central break with e4-e5 or maybe f4-f5. These ideas are borrowed from the asymmetric Benoni structure from Chapter 12, and they are White's only active plan. That is, White must try one of these breaks sooner or later. If instead White attempts to trade his b-pawn for Black's c5-pawn, then White's a-pawn will hardly be enough to win, as it will be an easy target for Black's pieces.

Isam Ortiz Suarez – Manuel Leon Hoyos

Havana 2011

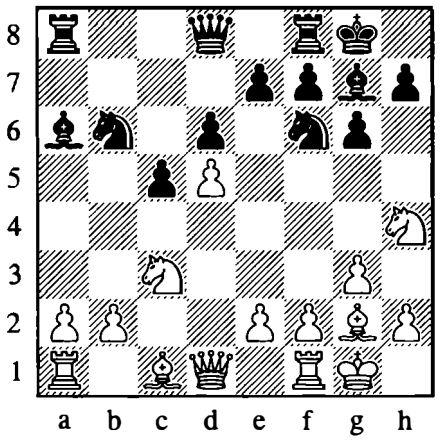
Learning objective: This game illustrates how Black's queenside initiative develops when White fails to create a fortress or a central break.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♗xa6 7.g3 d6 8.♗g2 ♗g7 9.♘f3 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♘b6 11.♘h4

The idea behind this relatively rare move is to protect the d5-pawn, in order to move the queen to c2 next.

Much more common is 11.♖e1.

11...0–0



12.♖b1

Instead 12.♕c2 seems more precise, since now 12...♘c4?! is met by 13.b3 ♘e5 14.♗b2 with

a stable position, though after 12.♕c2 ♘fd7 13.♖d1 ♕c7 14.♖b1 ♘c4 15.b3?! ♕a5!∓ Black is doing very well.

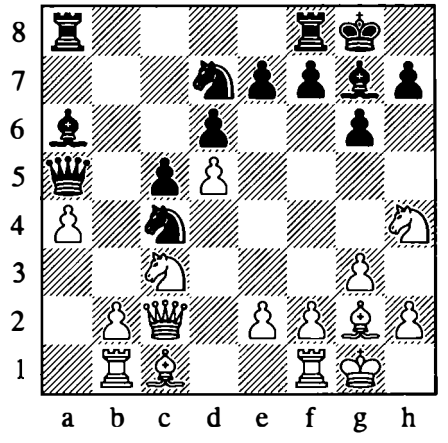
12...♘c4 13.♕c2

If 13.b3 then Black has time for 13...♕a5! since after: 14.♕c2 (14.bxc4? ♕xc3∓) 14...♘a3 15.♗xa3 ♕xa3 Black is ready to regain the pawn, say after: 16.♘f3 ♘d7 17.♖fc1 (but not 17.♖a1?! c4! 18.♖fc1 ♖fc8∓) 17...♗xc3 18.♕xc3 ♗xe2∓

13...♕a5 14.a4

White is trying to play b2-b3 to build a queenside fortress, but now:

14...♘d7!∓



This strong continuation threatens 15...♘a3.

15.♘a2

The careless 15.♖d1? is met by: 15...♘a3! 16.bxa3 ♕xc3 17.♕xc3 ♗xc3∓

15.♘d1 ♖fb8 16.b3 ♕b6! is also unpleasant for White, say after 17.♘f3 ♘a5 18.♗g5 h6! 19.♗e3 (but not 19.♗xe7? ♖e8 20.♗h4 ♖xe2–+) 19...♘f6∓ and the b3-pawn will fall sooner or later.

15...♘cb6!

A strong reply, attacking the a4-pawn and inviting b2-b3.

16.♗g5

Black is also better after: 16.b3 c4 17.b4 ♕xa4 18.♕d2 ♘e5 19.♘c3 ♕d7∓

16...♘xa4

Black's strategy has clearly succeeded, as he has recovered the pawn while maintaining the pressure on the queenside. It is clear that the pawn on b2 is weak while the c5-pawn is not.

Even better was 16...♕xa4! 17.♕xa4 ♘xa4 as after 18.♗xe7 ♖fe8 19.♗xd6 ♗xe2 20.♖fe1 ♗d3! White is losing too much material after: 21.♖bc1 ♗xb2 22.♖cd1 ♗c4 23.♘c1 ♘c3!–+

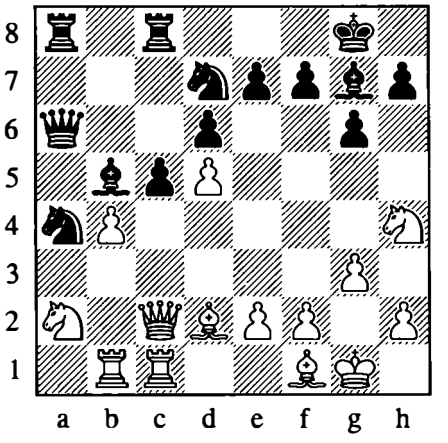
17.♖fc1

Again, White must avoid 17.♗xe7? ♖fe8 18.♗g5 ♖xe2.

17...♗b5 18.♗f1 ♖fe8 19.♗d2 ♕a6 20.b4?!

Or 20.♘c3 ♘xc3 21.♗xc3 ♗xc3 22.bxc3 ♗c4! attacking the d5-pawn, and after 23.e4 ♘e5 24.♔g2 ♗xf1† 25.♖xf1 ♕c4! White is lost, due to his vulnerable c3- and e4-pawns.

20...♖ec8!∓



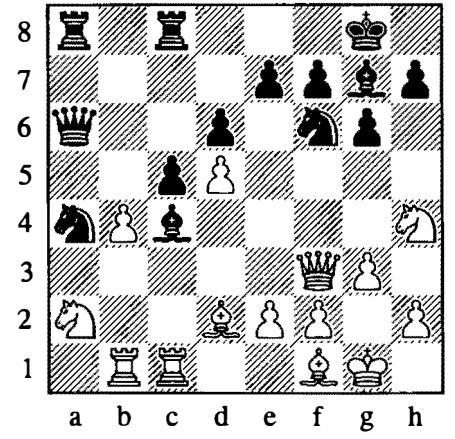
21.♕e4

If 21.bxc5 ♖xc5 the position is almost symmetrical, but White cannot avoid losing material due to Black's superior coordination. For example, 22.♕d1 ♘b2 23.♘b4 ♘xd1 24.♘xa6 ♗xa6 25.♖xd1 ♘f6∓ when the d5-pawn is lost.

21...♘f6! 22.♕f3

After 22.♕xe7? ♖e8 23.♕c7 ♘xd5 24.♕a5 ♕c6 White is lost as the queen is trapped.

22...♗c4–+



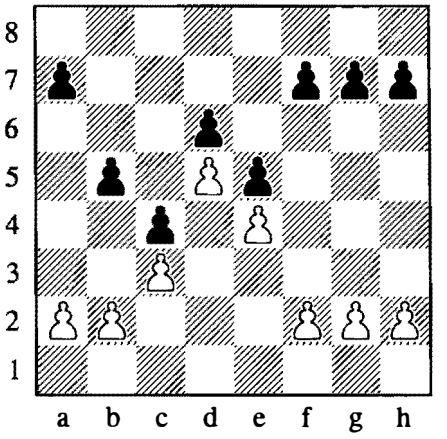
White's position collapses as the knight on a2 and the pawn on d5 are under attack. The rest is easy.

23.♘c3 ♘xc3 24.♗xc3 ♘xd5 25.♗xg7 ♔xg7 26.b5 ♕a4 27.b6 ♖cb8 28.b7 ♖a7 29.e4 ♗xf1 30.exd5 ♗a6 31.♖a1 ♕d4 32.♖a3 ♖bxb7 33.♖ca1 ♖b6 34.h3 ♕c4
0–1

Final remarks

1. White's strategy failed right from the opening, as he did not even get the time to play b2-b3 and a2-a4, and he was already facing serious threats.
2. Something remarkable about the Benko structure is how once Black regains the pawn, essentially all nearly-symmetrical positions favour Black. We see this very clearly in the notes to 20.♘c3 and 21.bxc5. Of course, Black's problem is I should not say "once" he regains the pawn, but "if" he regains the pawn.

The Closed Ruy Lopez



The Closed Ruy Lopez structure pictured above is one that arises almost exclusively from the Ruy Lopez opening. It is a very interesting structure, but I decided not to have a full chapter about it because it originates from just one opening, and because it is closely related to the King's Indian structures. The nature of this position most closely resembles the King's Indian Type II structure, the only difference being the pawns on c3 vs. c4 (instead of c4 vs. c5). This is in fact a big difference, as we will see in the typical plans for this position:

White's plans

1. Create a kingside attack with g2-g4, ♘bd2-f1-g3-f5, sacrifice a piece on f5 if needed.
2. Create a kingside attack with f2-f4, by analogy with Chapter 15.
3. Play on the queenside with b2-b4, a2-a4 and then invade on the a-file or attack one of Black's queenside pawns.

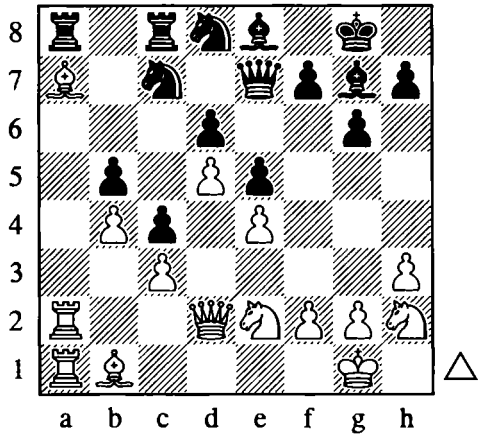
Black's plans

1. Create queenside play with ...a7-a5, ...b7-b5-b4.
2. Expand on the kingside with ...f7-f5-f4 by analogy with Chapters 15 and 16.

A major structural difference between this structure and the King's Indian structures is that in the Ruy Lopez White doesn't have a spatial advantage on the queenside. Still, having a powerful pawn on d5 is always a plus and will allow White to create queenside play on occasion.

Nevertheless, kingside plans are now more significant than ever for White, and it is important to keep them in mind as queenside play will not always work for him. Unlike pretty much all King's Indian-type positions, Black is now likely to succeed by playing actively on the queenside, though the kingside plans remain valid. But often White will pay so much attention to the kingside that Black will opt for queenside plans. For this reason, in many cases White will first devote his energies to closing the queenside, and only then move on to a kingside attack.

White Blocks the Queenside and Wins on the Kingside



The position in the diagram occurred in the famous **Karpov – Unzicker** game from the Nice Olympiad of 1974. Since this example is well-known to many, I will present it without annotations. The most important thing to observe is the position in the diagram. White has managed to block the queenside in a very original way: by placing the bishop on a7. In contrast to simply closing the queenside with pawns, having this bishop on a7 means White can re-open the file whenever he wants. Nevertheless, this will not be necessary, as his kingside play will decide the game. Here, Karpov proceeded with:

30.f4! f6 31.f5 g5 32.♗c2 ♗f7 33.♘g3 ♘b7 34.♗d1!

The winning manoeuvre; Black cannot prevent a light-square penetration.

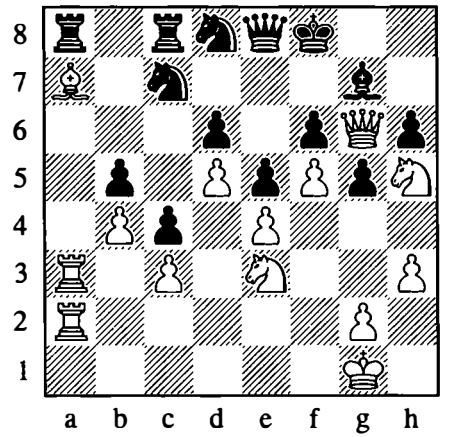
34...h6

Or 34...♕e8 35.♗b6 ♖xa2 36.♖xa2 ♕d7 37.♖a7 ♖b8 38.♗h5 and White wins.

35.♗h5 ♕e8 36.♕d1 ♘d8 37.♖a3 ♔f8 38.♖1a2 ♔g8 39.♘g4! ♔f8

Not 39...♗xh5 40.♘xh5 ♕xh5? 41.♘xf6†! ♗xf6 42.♕xh5 and White wins even faster than in the game.

40.♘e3 ♔g8 41.♗xf7† ♘xf7 42.♕h5 ♘d8 43.♕g6 ♔f8 44.♘h5



Black had suffered long enough.

1–0

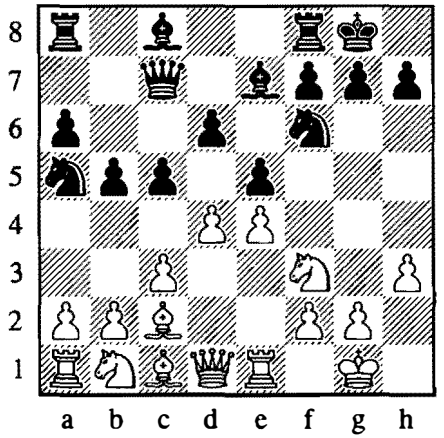
Ivan Morovic Fernandez – Fadi Eid

Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of how White can neutralize Black's queenside play and even gain a queenside edge.
2. Observe how after some pawns are traded on the queenside, the nature of the position resembles more and more the King's Indian Type I structure.

1.♘f3 ♘c6 2.e4 e5 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0–0 9.h3 ♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7



So far we are following the main line of the Chigorin Defence against the Ruy Lopez, and now White chooses a sideline:

12.d5

Closing the centre and hoping for a long game away from theory.

The main line is 12.♘bd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♘c6 14.♘b3 a5 15.♗e3 a4 16.♘bd2 ♗d7 17.♖c1 ♖fc8 18.♗b1 ♕b7 when White has a tiny advantage.

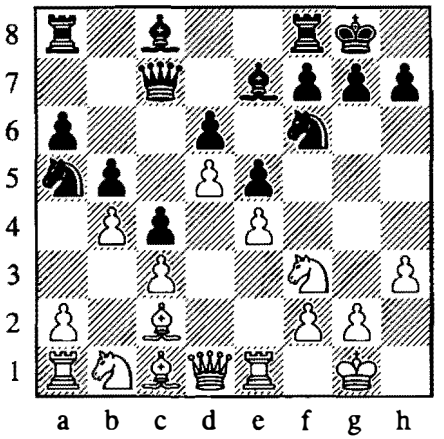
12...c4?!

A premature move.

Better was 12...♗d7 13.b3 ♘b7 14.♘bd2 g6 15.♘f1 ♘e8 16.♗h6 ♘g7 17.g4 f6 18.♘g3 ♘d8 19.♔h2 ♘f7 where Black's last few moves should all be remembered, as they constitute a standard and ideal arrangement in this position. Black manages to keep his kingside secure.

13.b4!±

This move pretty much forces Black to give up his hopes of active play on the queenside.



13...cxb3

If 13...♘b7 14.a4 ♗d7 15.a5! and Black is likely to face problems on the kingside. 15...♘d8 16.♘h2 ♘e8 Attempting ...g7-g6, ...f7-f6, ...♘g7, ...♘f7, but after 17.♘g4 g6 18.f4! White takes the initiative. For example: 18...exf4 19.♗xf4 ♗xg4 20.♕xg4 ♗f6 21.♖f1±

14.axb3 ♗d7 15.♗a3!

Threatening 16.♘xe5.

15...♗d8

The only defence.

Instead 15...♖fe8? falls into: 16.♘xe5! dxe5 17.♗xe7 ♖xe7 18.d6+–

16.♗d3 ♘b7?!

Making things easier for White.

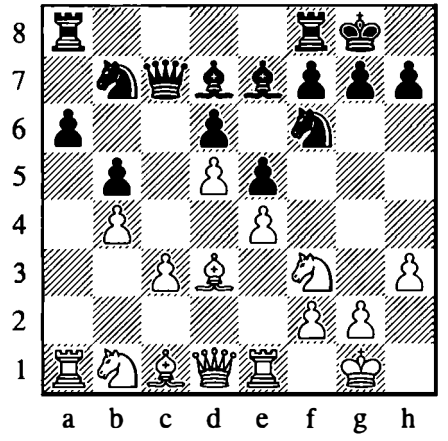
Better was 16...♖e8 17.♖e2!? ♘h5 18.♖ea2 ♘f4 19.♗f1 f5!? when Black poses some resistance.

17.b4!

An important move, preventing Black's knight from coming back into the game with ...♘c5. And it's the second time in this game White has played an excellent b4-advance.

17...♗e7 18.♗c1

A good rearrangement; the bishop is heading to e3 and now the a-file will serve to attack the a6-pawn.



18...♖fc8

18...♘d8 doesn't help: 19.♖e2 ♕b7 Black protects the a6-pawn, but allows 20.♗e3 ♘e8 21.c4!± opening the position very favourably. For example: 21...bxc4 22.♗xc4 ♕xb4 23.♕c1 ♖c8 24.♖c2 a5 25.♘bd2 a4 26.♖b1 ♕a5 27.♖b6 White is winning; the a4-pawn will soon be lost, and Black will be unable to hold the d6-pawn for long.

19.♖e2!± a5

If 19...h6 20.♖ea2 ♕b6 21.♗e3 and the a6-pawn is lost.

20.♖ea2 ♕d8 21.♗e3 axb4?!

Making things easier; now that the position is so open, the b5-pawn will be a very easy target.

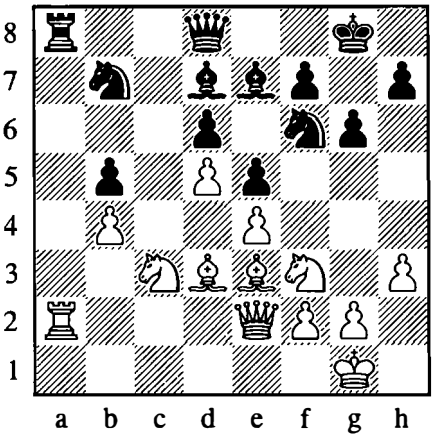
If 21...a4 22.♕e2 ♕e8 23.♗d2 ♘d8 24.♘a3 ♖ab8 25.c4 bxc4 26.♘xc4± White has a big advantage, as his central space advantage will allow him to develop his queenside threats more easily.

Waiting with 21...h6 does not help, for example 22.♕e2 ♕e8 23.♘fd2 (23.bxa5?! ♘c5±) 23...♘h7 24.♘b3 a4 25.♘3d2± followed by c3-c4.

22.cxb4 ♖xa2 23.♖xa2 ♖a8 24.♕e2 g6

The b5-pawn is also lost after: 24...♖xa2 25.♕xa2 ♘e8 26.♘c3 ♘c7 27.♗b6 ♕c8 28.♗xc7 ♕xc7 29.♕b2 (29.♘xb5? ♕c1† 30.♔h2 ♕f4†=) 29...♕b6 30.♕e2+–

25.♘c3+–



The b5-pawn is lost and the rest is simple.

25...♖xa2 26.♕xa2 ♕c7

Or 26...♕e8 27.♕a6 is also easy.

27.♘xb5 ♗xb5 28.♗xb5 ♘xe4 29.♕a7

Black resigns due to the threat of ♗a6.

1–0

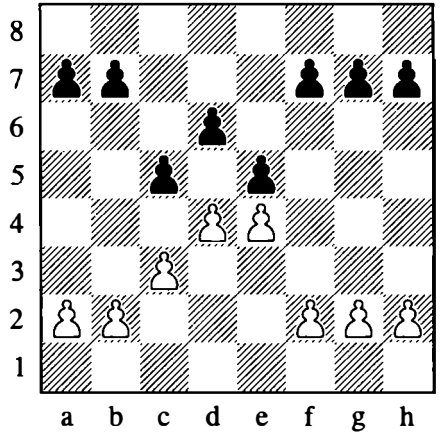
Final remarks

1. The fact that White obtained a superior position after some pawns were traded on the queenside should be no surprise. We have seen similar patterns in Chapter 14. The key is the spatial advantage provided by the d5-pawn and

the c6-square. In this game, this is what made it so easy for White to attack the b5-pawn.

2. Black's biggest mistake was playing the premature 12...c4, permitting the strong 13.b4. This move allowed White to neutralize Black's queenside play immediately, and later obtain chances for an advantage as the position opened up.

The Lopez Formation



Similarly to the King's Indian Complex which we studied in Chapter 18, the Lopez Formation is a very flexible structure. The name 'Lopez Formation' was introduced by Soltis in the 1970's and refers to the fact that this structure almost always arises from the Ruy Lopez. In essence, this structure is one in transition. Depending on how White and Black proceed in the centre, this structure will be transformed in one of the following ways:

1. White advances d4-d5 and later c3-c4, obtaining a King's Indian Type II structure (Chapter 15).
2. White advances d4-d5 and Black replies ...c5-c4, to obtain a Closed Ruy Lopez, which has just been covered.
3. White captures d4xe5 (or d4xc5) and Black recaptures ...d6xe5 (or ...d6xc5), obtaining a typical transformation of the King's Indian Complex (Chapter 18).
4. Black captures ...e5xd4 and after c3xd4 White proceeds with d4-d5, obtaining an Asymmetric Benoni (Chapter 12).
5. Black captures ...c5xd4 and after c3xd4 White proceeds with d4-d5, obtaining a King's Indian Type I structure (Chapter 14).
6. Black trades two pawns on d4 with ...c5xd4 followed by ...e5xd4 (or in the other order). The resulting position has not been discussed in previous chapters, and here we will see an example of it.

David Navara – Ivan Sokolov

Reykjavik 2012

Learning objectives:

1. This game is an example of Black's central counterplay after a double pawn trade on d4.
2. Note how the e4-pawn becomes a serious target before White can organize an attack against the technically weak d6-pawn.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 d6 5.0–0 ♘f6 6.♖e1 ♗d7 7.c3 g6 8.d4 b5 9.♗b3 ♗g7

So far we are following a standard variation of the Deferred Steinitz Variation, and now:

10.♗g5?!

This is the beginning of a bad plan.

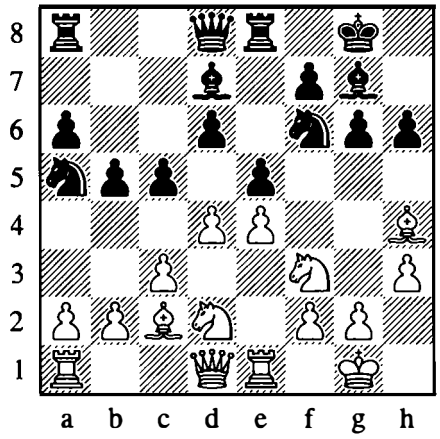
Instead 10.h3 0–0 11.♘bd2 h6 12.♘f1 ♖e8 13.♘g3 is a healthier approach, since the bishop is more useful on c1 than on h4.

10...0–0 11.♘bd2 ♖e8 12.h3 h6 13.♗h4

White's bishop will be quite useless on this square.

Better was 13.♗e3! since 13...exd4?! 14.cxd4 ♘xe4? is met by: 15.♘xe4 ♖xe4 16.♕c2! ♖e7 (or 16...♕e8 17.♗xh6!±) 17.♕xg6!±

13...♘a5 14.♗c2 c5!



And we have obtained our Lopez Formation. Black has made a good choice since he is well prepared if White closes the centre with d4-d5. In addition, the move 14...c5 allows ...♕c7, moving away from the pin and leaving the bishop on h4 doing nothing.

15.♘b3?!

A strange choice that is too slow for the position.

Instead 15.d5 ♕c7 gives Black a good position, as his fianchettoed bishop makes for an impenetrable kingside. Meanwhile, White's dark-squared bishop is somewhat misplaced. A possible continuation was 16.♗xf6 (or 16.♘f1 ♘h5) 16...♗xf6 17.♘f1 ♗g7 18.♘e3 ♖f8 when Black plans ...f7-f5 with good kingside play.

If 15.dxc5 dxc5 16.♘f1 ♕c7 17.♘e3 ♗e6 Black is not worse, as his queenside has already expanded while the d5-square is protected.

15...cxd4 16.♘xa5

An option was 16.cxd4 exd4 17.♘bxd4 ♕b6 though Black is very comfortable and active. For example: 18.♗g3 (or 18.a4 ♘h5! threatening ...g5) 18...♘c4 19.♖b1 (or 19.b3 ♘a3∓) 19...♖ad8 (or 19...♗c8!? followed by ...♗b7 attacking e4) And now White is defenceless against the threat of 20...d5, for example: 20.a4 d5 21.e5 ♘e4!∓

16...♕xa5 17.cxd4 exd4!

A good decision, opening the position and taking advantage of White's poorly-arranged pieces.

18.♘xd4

18.♕xd4 is met by 18...g5! 19.♗g3 ♘xe4 20.♗e5 dxe5 21.♕xe4 ♕c7∓ when White's compensation is quite insufficient.

18...♕b6∓

We have reached a critical position and it is time to make an assessment. In the long term White should have a huge advantage because the d6-pawn is a weak isolated backward pawn – an easy target. However, Black's pieces are arranged so well that it is not clear White will have a long term! Black's bishop is extremely powerful along the h8-a1 diagonal, pressuring the knight on d4 and the pawn on b2. Meanwhile White's bishop on h4 is rather useless, and would have been far better placed on b2 or e3.

When Black decides to trade both pawns on d4, he must carefully assess whether he will have enough counterplay to compensate for the weak d6-pawn. In this case Black has made an excellent choice and in fact he is already better.

19.♘f3 ♗e6

Clearing d7 for the knight.

20.♘d4

Or 20.♕d2 ♘d7 21.♗d1 ♖ac8 22.♗g3 ♘c5 23.♖c1 ♕b7 24.♗c2 d5! trading the weak d6-pawn: 25.exd5 ♗xd5∓

20...♗c8!

Now the bishop is heading to b7, and suddenly the e4-pawn is far weaker than the d6-pawn.

21.♕d2

Correct was: 21.♘e2! ♗b7 (not 21...♘xe4? 22.♘f4! and White gains counterplay, for example: 22...♗b7 23.♘d5 ♗xd5 24.♕xd5 ♘f6 25.♗xf6 ♗xf6 26.♗xg6!±) 22.♘c3 Now after either 22...♖ac8∓ or 22...d5!? Black preserves a comfortable position.

21...♗b7 22.♗xf6

22.f3? is met by: 22...♘xe4! 23.♗xe4 ♕xd4†∓

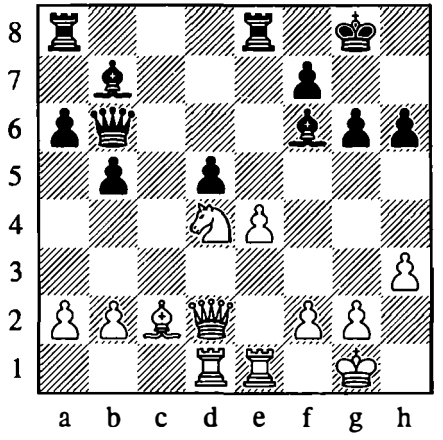
22...♗xf6 23.♖ad1?

The last mistake.

White puts up a better fight after 23.♘f3! ♖ac8! (but not 23...♗xb2?! 24.♕xh6! with good compensation) 24.♗b3 ♔g7∓ when White's pawns on e4 and b2 are vulnerable.

23...d5!–+

The 'weak' d6-pawn arrives to decide the game. Black is winning a pawn with a decisive advantage.



24.♗b3

The point is that 24.exd5? loses a piece after 24...♖xe1† 25.♖xe1 ♗xd4.

24.e5 is also inadequate: 24...♗xe5 25.♘f3 ♗g7 26.♗b3 d4!–+

24...♖xe4 25.♖xe4 dxe4 26.♘f5!?

A good try in a lost position.

26...♖d8!

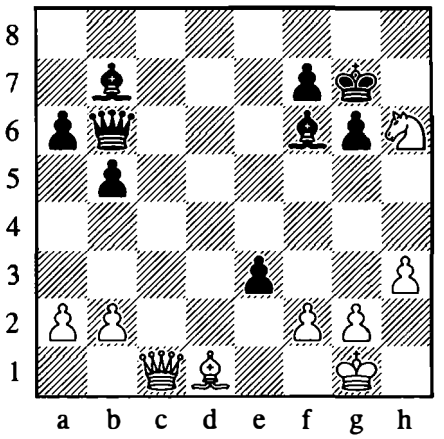
But not 26...gxf5? 27.♕xh6! when Black has nothing better than a draw after: 27...♗d4 28.♕g5† ♔h8 (28...♔f8?! 29.♕xf5±) 29.♕h5† ♔g8 30.♕g5†=

27.♘xh6†

Instantly hopeless is 27.♕xh6? ♖xd1† 28.♗xd1 gxf5.

27...♔g7 28.♕c1 ♖xd1† 29.♗xd1 e3!

Winning a decisive tempo by attacking the knight.



30.♘g4 exf2† 31.♔f1 ♗d4

The rest is simple.

32.♕h6† ♔g8 33.♕f4 ♕c6 34.♗f3 ♕c4† 35.♗e2 ♗xg2† 36.♔xg2 ♕xe2 37.♘h6† ♔h7 0–1

Final remarks

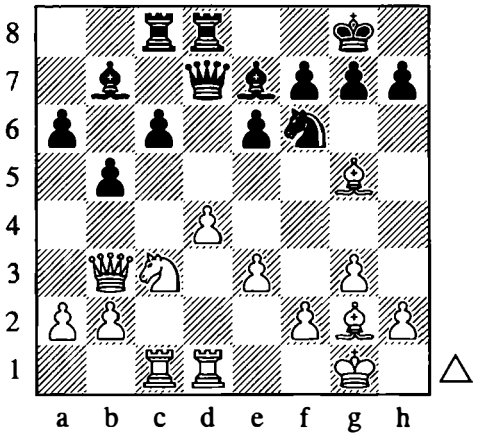
1. The d6-pawn was never a weakness. Instead, the e4-pawn was quite vulnerable, since playing f2-f3 would severely weaken the g1-a7 diagonal.
2. One of White's biggest problems was not having the dark-squared bishop on b2 or e3, to parry the threats.
3. Black's counterplay was particularly successful because of White's poor coordination. The double pawn trade on d4 would not work as well if White could manage to stabilize the position.

Chapter 23 Exercises

Level 1

Granda Zuniga – Vega, Bahia Feliz 2011

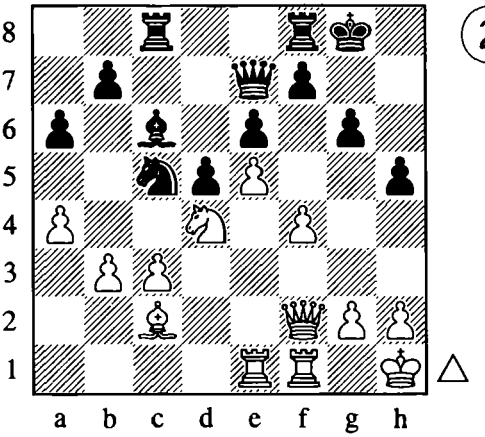
1



How should White consolidate his positional advantage?

Carlsen – Radjabov, Moscow 2012

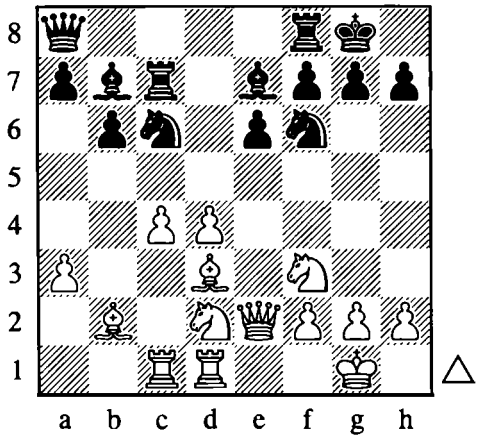
2



Find White's best continuation.

Mareco – Werjivker, Montevideo 2013

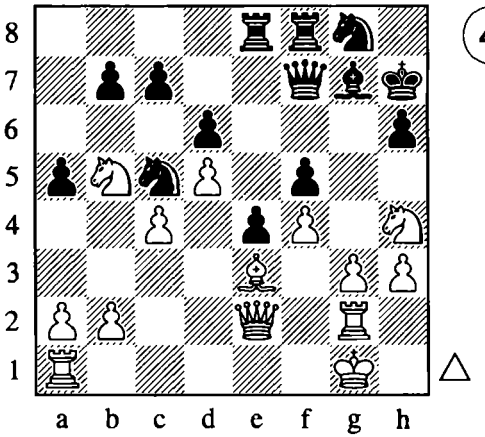
3



Find White's strongest continuation.

Zvjaginsev – Cvitan, Vienna 1996

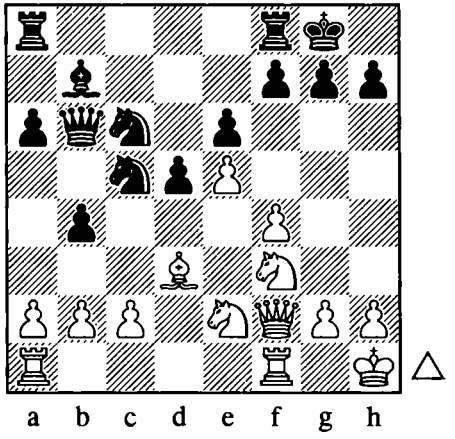
4



Find White's best continuation.

Khairullin – Goganov, St Petersburg 2012

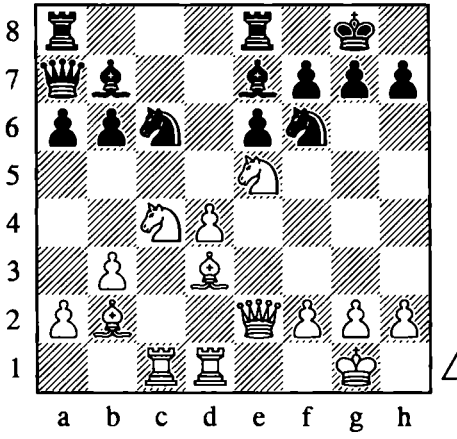
5



Find White's best continuation.

Iturrizaga Bonelli – Papin, Moscow 2010

6

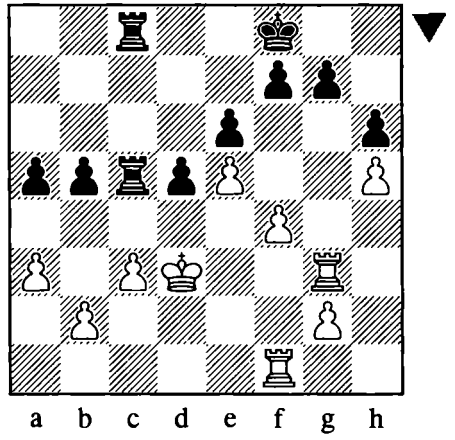


How should White proceed?

Level 2

Naroditsky – Kamsky, Saint Louis 2011

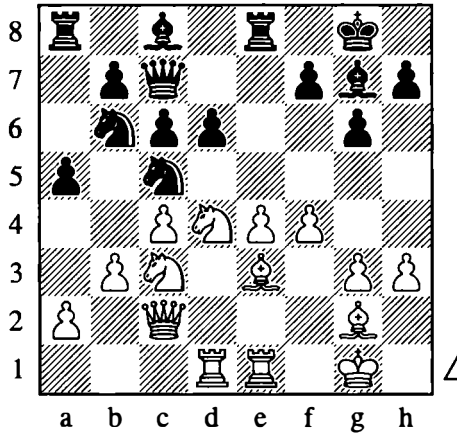
7



What is your evaluation of the position? How should Black proceed?

Leitao – Robledo, Mar del Plata 2009

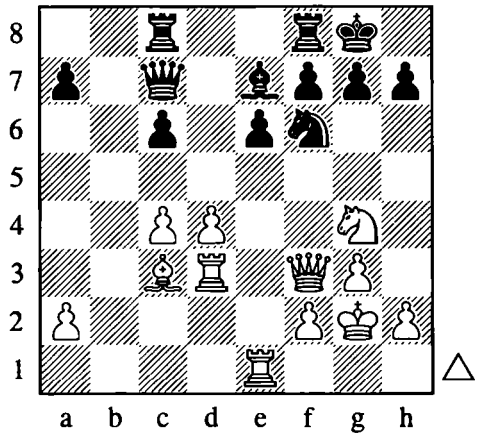
8



Find three moves which each obtain a big advantage for White.

Leitao – Di Berardino, Manaus 2013

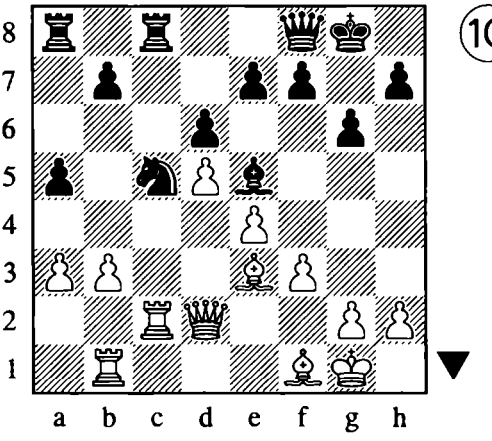
9



How should White proceed?

Vuckovic – Damljanovic, Valjevo 2000

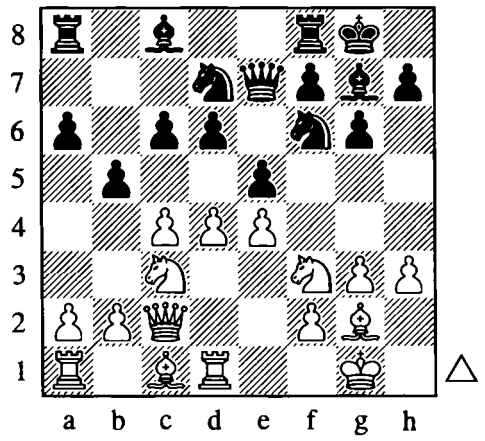
10



Evaluate the position. How should Black proceed?

Braun – Polzin, Germany 2008

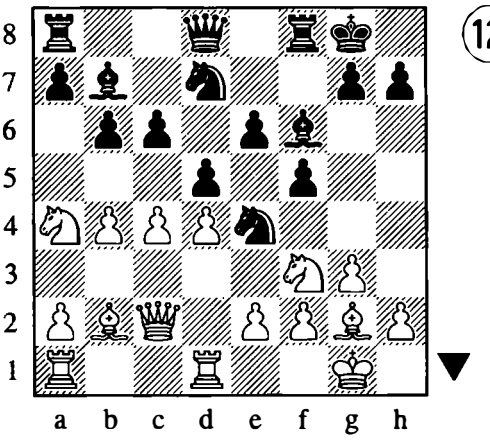
11



How should White proceed?

Rosell – Nikolic, Barcelona 2012

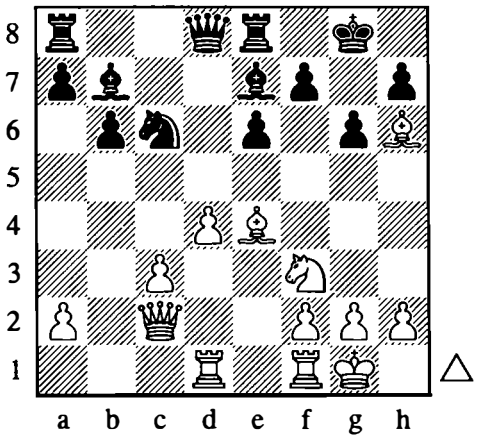
12



How should Black proceed?

Dzieczkaniec – Macieja, Wroclaw 2011

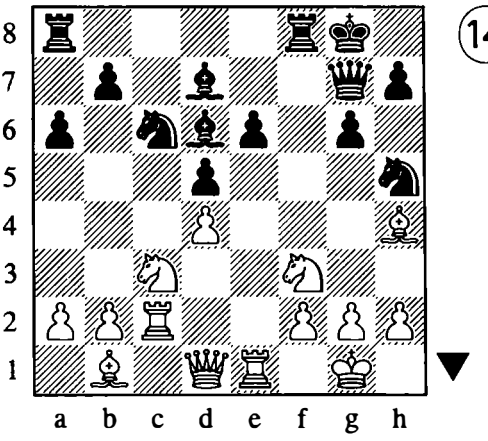
13



What should White play?

Mista – Navara, Czech Republic 2005

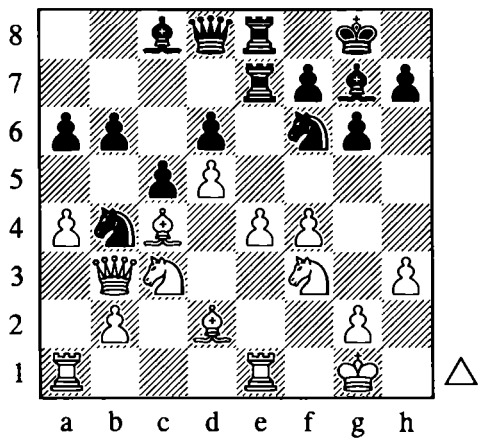
14



White's last move was 18.♖c1-c2. How should Black respond?

Akesson – Gabrielian, Pardubice 2010

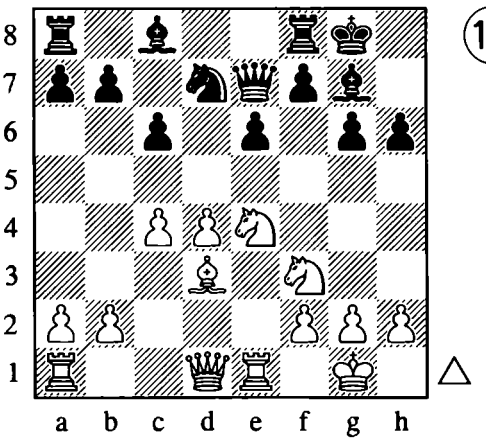
15



Black's last move was 17...♖a7-e7. How should White reply?

Cordova – Cabrera, Yucay 2001

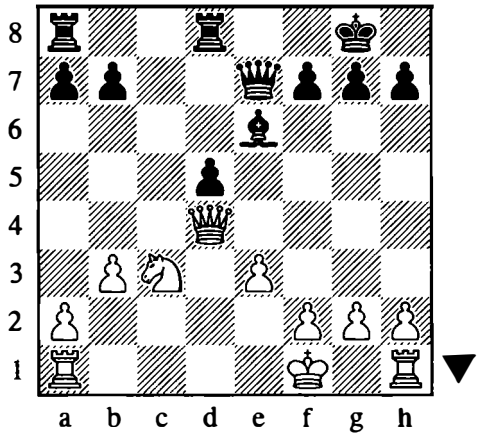
16



What is White's thematic continuation in this position?

Cvek – Navara, Ledec nad Sazavou 2013

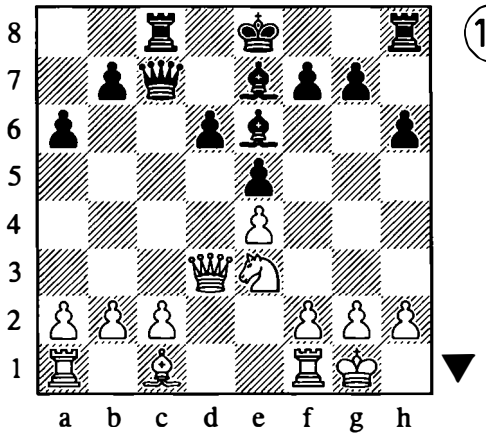
17



Evaluate the position and suggest a continuation for Black.

Sprenger – Navara, Sibenik 2012

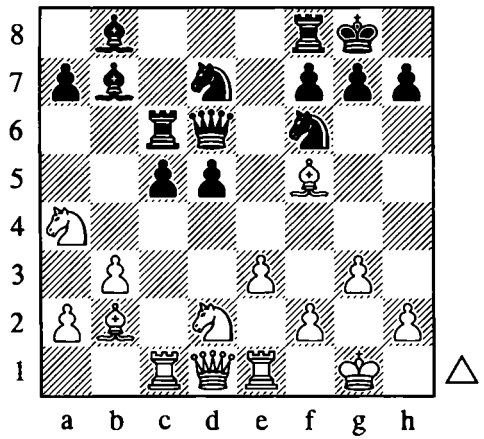
18



Find Black's best continuation.

Granda Zuniga – Latorre Lopez Moreira, Cochabamba 2013

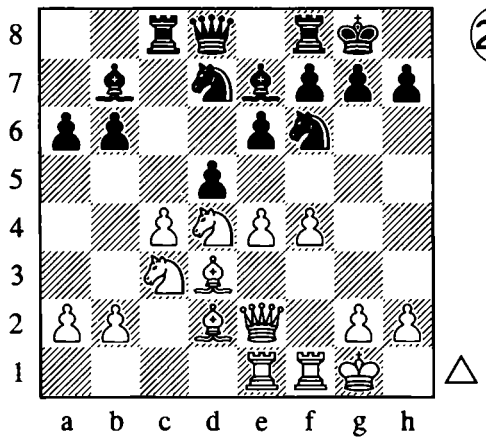
19



Find White's strongest continuation.

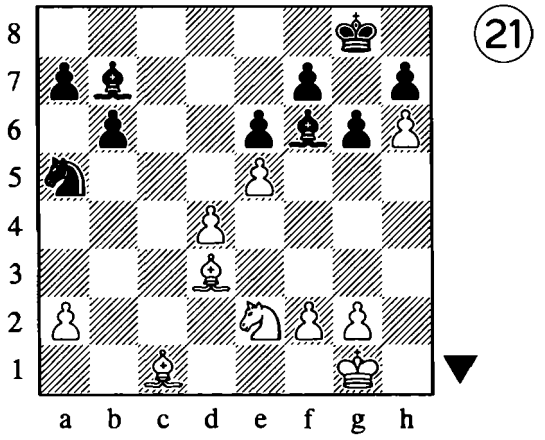
Szabo – Flores Rios, Belfort 2005

20



Black's last move was 14...d5. Analyze the position and find White's best reaction.

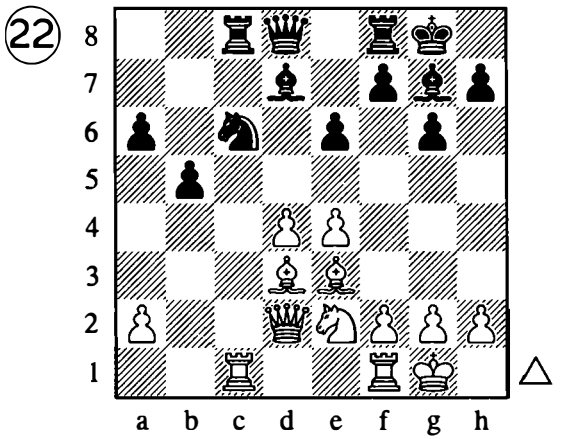
Harikrishna – Dominguez, Melilla 2011



White's last move was 23.e4-e5. Evaluate this move and describe how the game may develop.

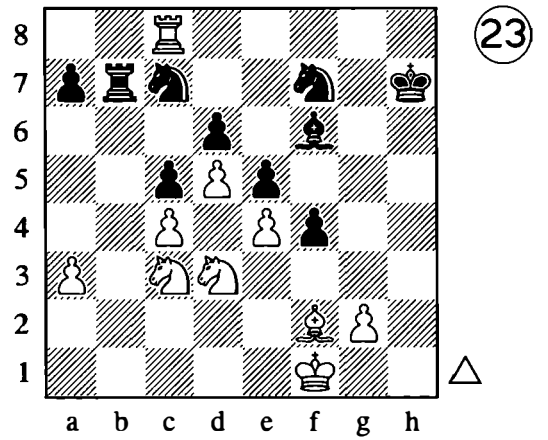
Level 3

Landa – Ponomariov, Sochi 2012



White now played 16.a4. Is this a good move? If not, how should White have played instead?

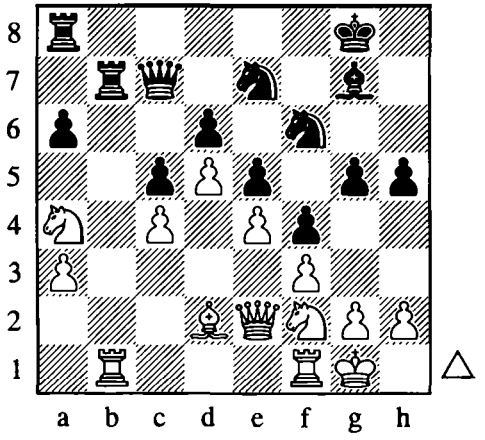
Kramnik – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2010



How should White proceed?

Mareco – Ivanov, Buenos Aires 2009

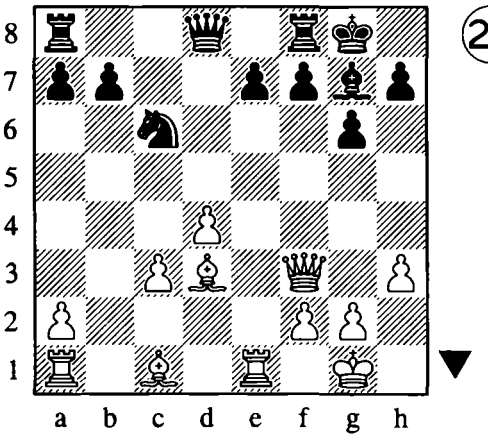
24



Black's last move was 21...♖b8-b7. Was this a good move? How should White reply?

Collins – Macieja, Freemont 2012

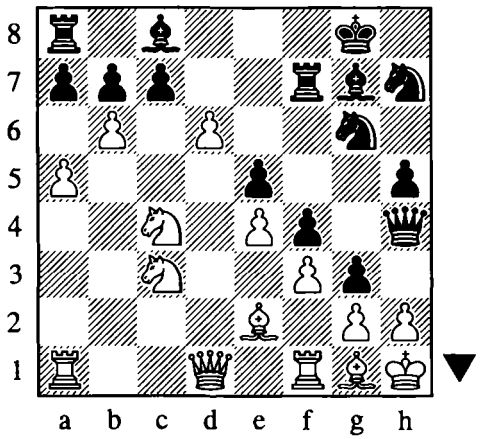
25



Evaluate the position and find Black's strongest continuation.

Ftacnik – Cvitan, Germany 1997

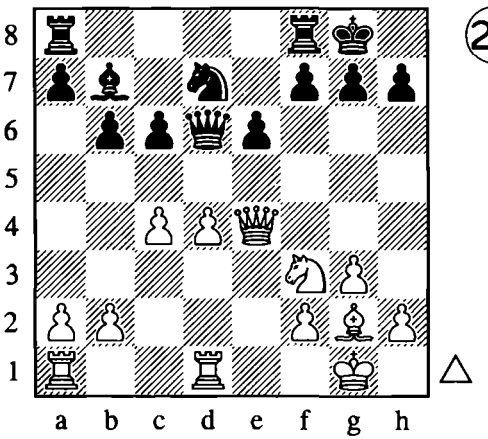
26



How should Black continue, and what is the evaluation of the position?

Bachmann – Britez, Foz do Iguacu 2013

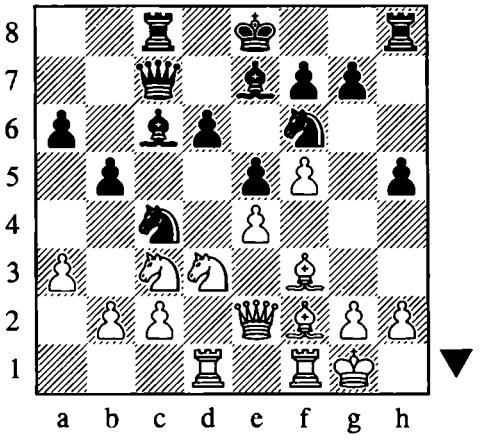
27



Find White's thematic response in this position.

Geller – Khismatullin, Taganrog 2013

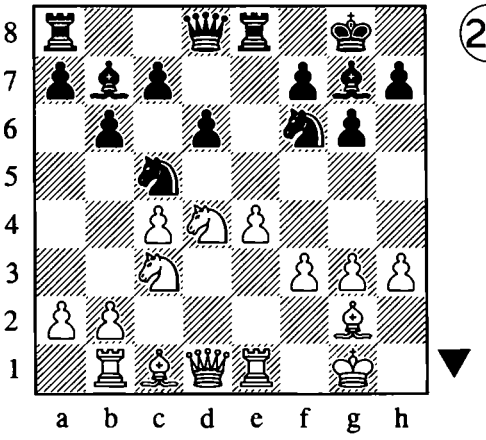
28



Find the strongest continuation for Black.

Vasquez – Rios, Santiago 2010

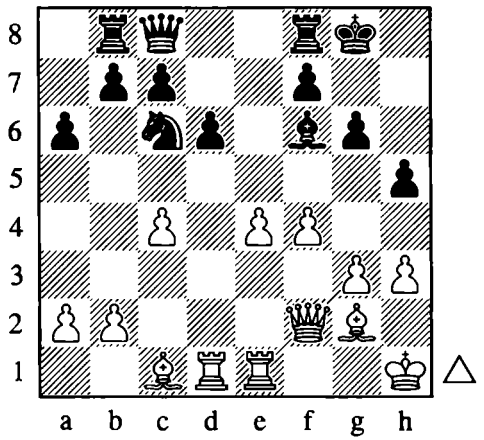
29



How should Black create counterplay?

Gharamian – Mamedov, Aix-les-Bains 2011

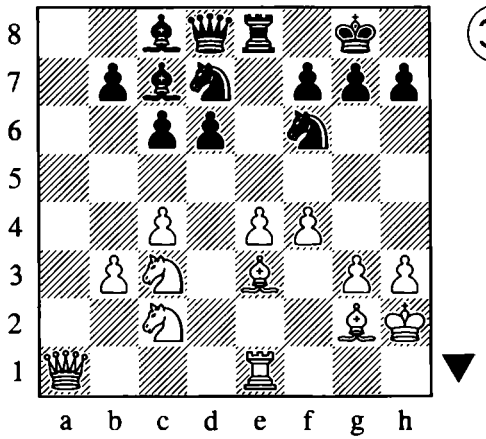
30



How should White use his spatial advantage?

Quintiliano – Mareco, Maringa 2012

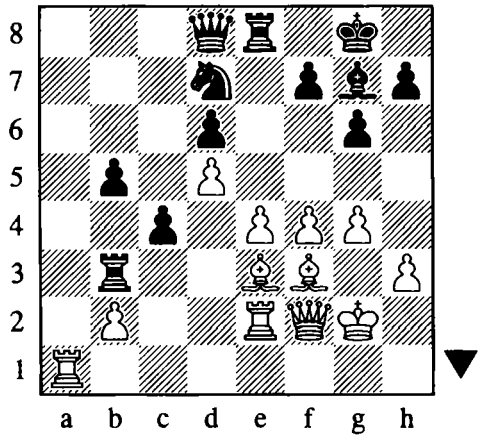
31



How can Black find counterplay?

Arencibia – Vera, Havana 1986

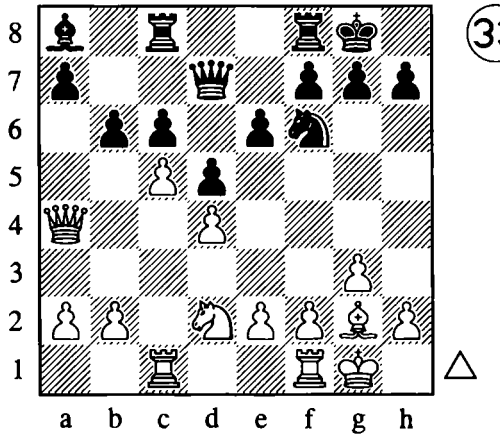
32



Black has an excellent position. How can he consolidate his lead?

Kramnik – Polgar, Dortmund 1997

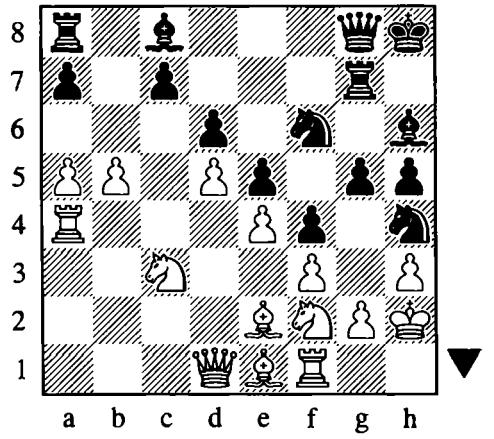
33



How should White proceed?

Granda Zuniga – Milos, Quito 2012

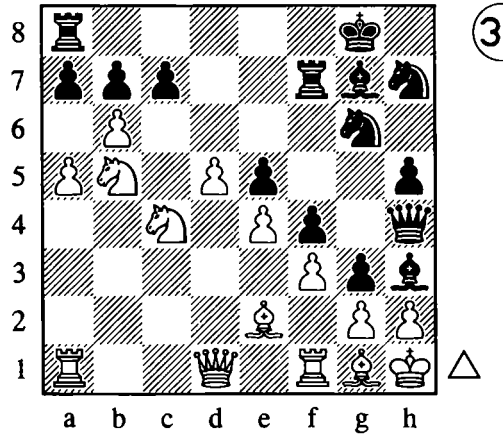
34



Find Black's strongest continuation.

Epishin – Cvitan, Switzerland 1997

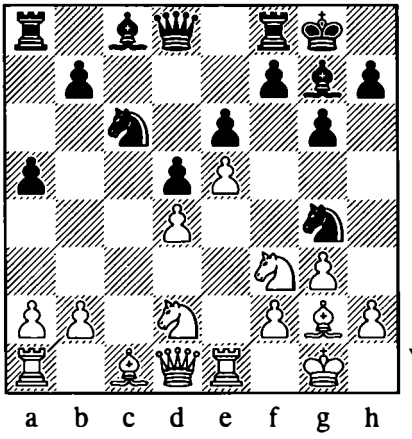
35



Black's last move was 22...♗h3. What is your evaluation of the position? How should White proceed?

Ehlvest – Kuipers, Gibraltar 2013

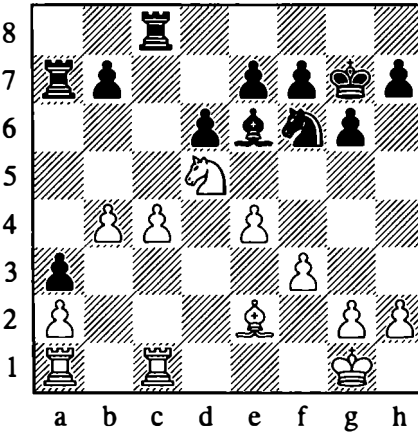
36



How should Black play?

Qingnan Liu – Bu Xiangzhi, Qinhuangdao 2011

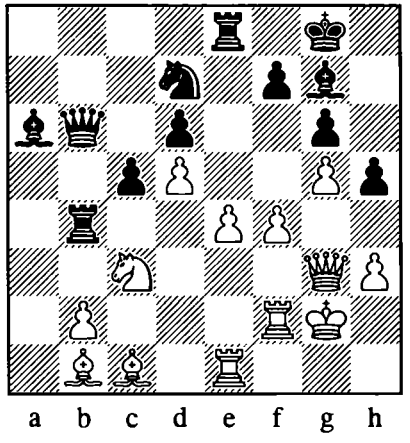
37



Evaluate the position and suggest a move for Black.

Leitao – Diamant, Rio de Janeiro 2009

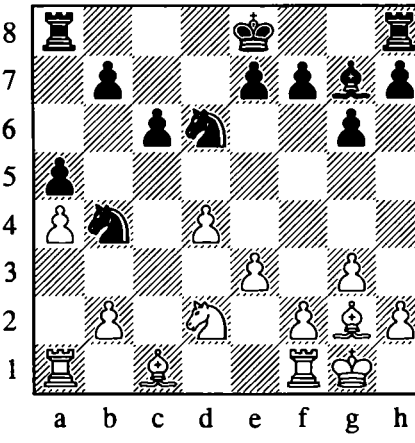
38



Evaluate the position and find White's best reaction.

Kunin – Volokitin, Austria 2012

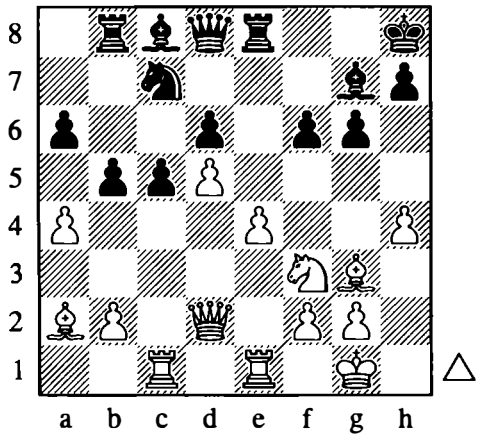
39



Find Black's strongest move.

Agrest – Caruana, Arvier 2007

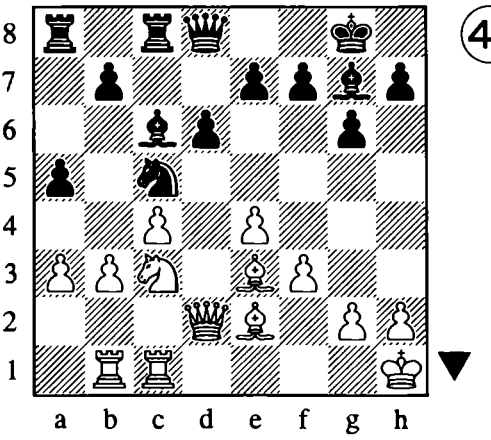
40



Black's last move was 24...b5. How should White respond?

Flores Rios – Alonso, Magistral Endesa 2007

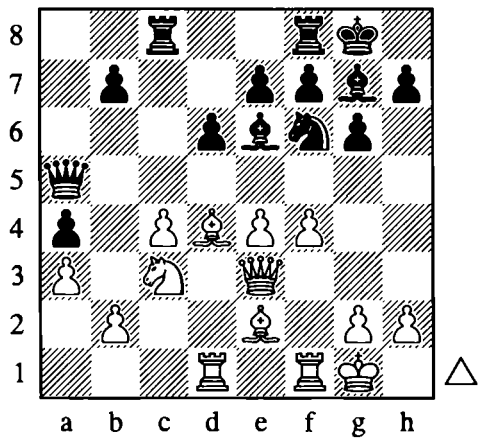
41



White's last move was 18.a3. How would you rate this move?

Almasi – Macieja, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010

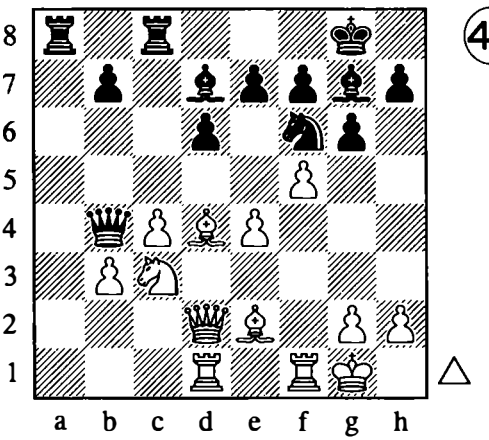
42



How should White proceed?

Edouard – Cebalo, Biel 2012

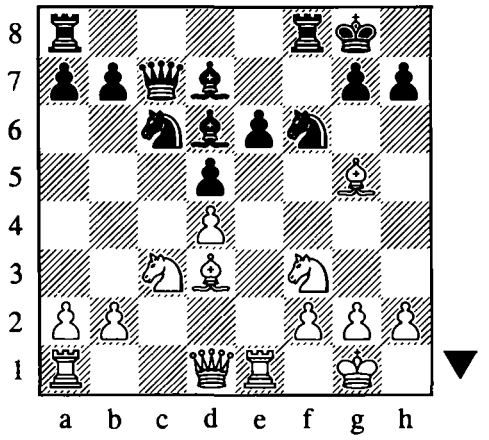
43



Find a strong continuation for White.

Gelashvili – Timman, Saint Vincent 2000

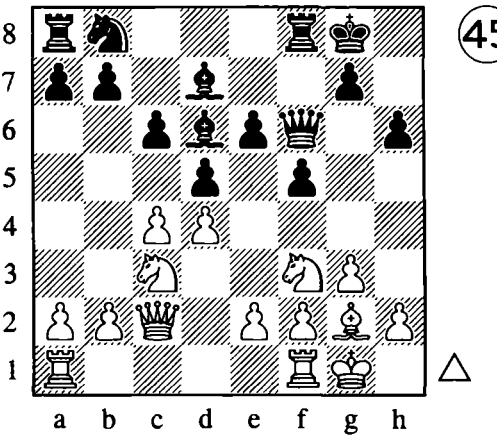
44



White's last move was 12.♘e2-c3. How should Black respond?

Lemos – Larrea, Asuncion 2011

45

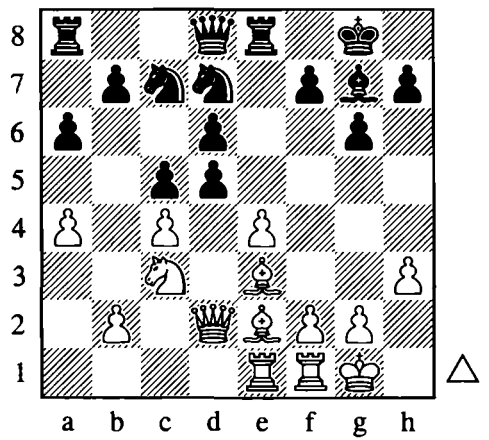


Find a good continuation for White.

Level 4

Radjabov – Guseinov, Baku 2010

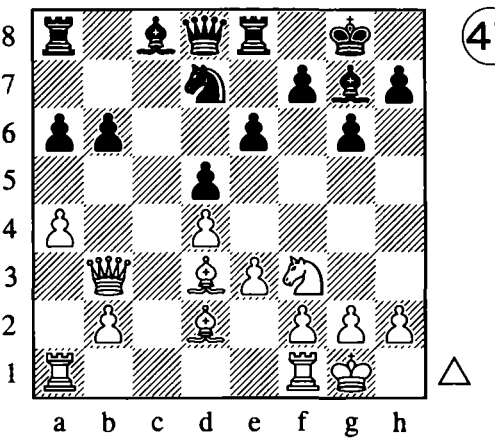
46



Black's last move was 16...exd5. How should White reply?

Leitao – Barreto, Campinas 2009

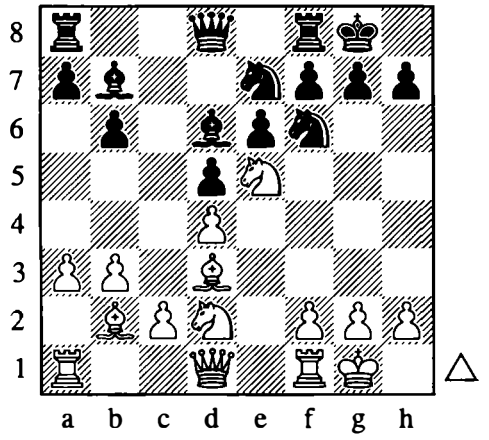
47



How should White continue?

Cori Tello – Melkumyan, Moscow 2012

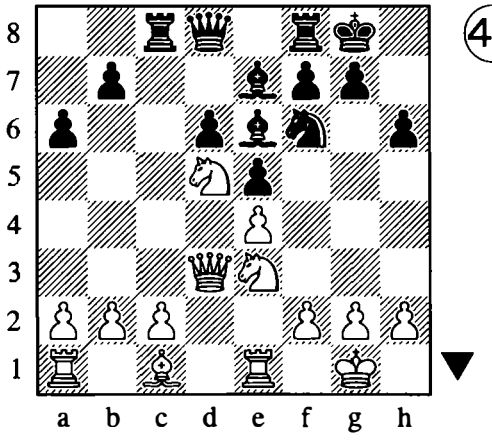
48



Evaluate the position and suggest a plan for White.

Garcia – Henriquez, Punta Arenas 2014

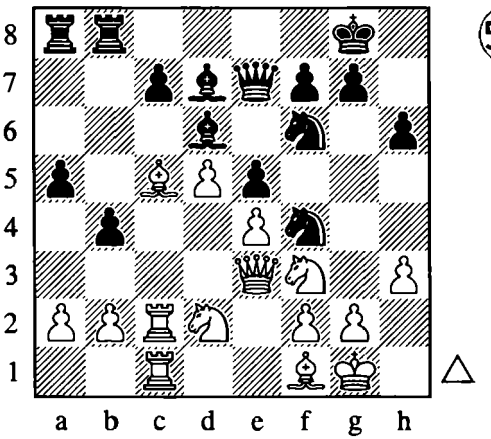
49



Black is to play and will surely choose 14...♘xd5. How should White respond? What is the evaluation?

Nielsen – Berzinsh, Eretria 2011

50



How should White continue?

Chapter 24 Solutions

Level 1

1. Julio Granda Zuniga – Sabrina Vega

Bahia Feliz 2011

The key in the Slav structure is to prevent the central release with ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5, hence the typical sequence:

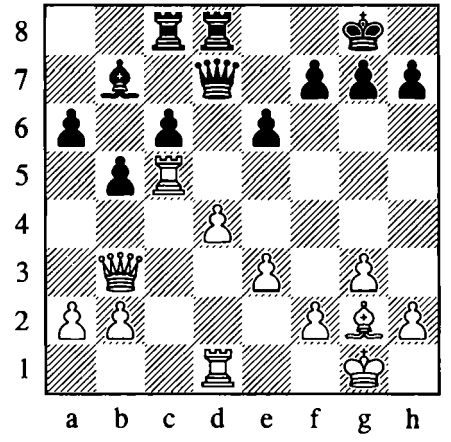
17.♗xf6! ♗xf6 18.♘e4

This leaves Black in a desperate situation as White has gained undisputed control of the c5-square, and ...e6-e5 does not work either.

18...♗e7

Or 18...♕e7 19.♘xf6† ♕xf6 20.♖c5 is crushing.

19.♘c5 ♗xc5 20.♖xc5



White won easily by pressing on the c6-pawn, bringing the king to the queenside, and then expanding his kingside pawns.

...1–0

2. Magnus Carlsen – Teimour Radjabov

Moscow 2012

The reader should note that the squares around Black's king are weakened, and there are no pieces to provide immediate protection, hence it makes sense to open up the position with:

26.f5!±

The standard break in the French structure.

26...exf5?

Making things easier for White.

The only defence was 26...♘e4, though White has many attractive options such as 27.♗xe4 dxe4 28.♕f4!? exf5 29.♘xf5! when the attack continues, since 29...gxf5? loses immediately to 30.♕g3†! ♔h7 31.♖xf5.

27.♘xf5! gxf5

27...♕e6 loses to 28.♕xc5 gxf5 29.♗xf5.

28.♕g3†!

Black resigned due to the unavoidable mate after 28...♔h7 29.♖xf5.

1–0

3. Sandro Mareco – Paulo Werjivker

Montevideo 2013

White's bishops on b2 and d3 have strong attacking potential, and White's pieces are excellently coordinated, hence it makes sense to break in the centre with:

16.d5!+–

Demolishing Black's defence.

16...exd5?
Making things easier for White.

The try 16...♘d8 is nicely refuted by 17.♘g5 h6 18.♕e5 ♘e8 19.♘h7 winning an exchange and the game.

17.cxd5
Winning a piece.

17...♘xd5 18.♕e4
1–0

4. Vadim Zvjaginsev – Ognjen Cvitan

Vienna 1996

As we studied in Wojtaszek – Fedorov (page 283) it is crucial to hit the base of the e4-f5 chain with:

24.g4!+–
Black's position is completely destroyed.

24...fxg4 25.hxg4 ♘d3
There is nothing better.

26.g5!
Threatening g5-g6.
1–0

Black resigned because the kingside attack is irresistible, for example:

26...♕d7
26...hxg5 is an even quicker loss 27.fxg5 ♔h8 28.g6 followed by ♕h5.

Or 26...♔h8 27.f5 ♘e5 when White wins with 28.f6 or the even stronger 28.♘g6†!.

27.f5 ♖xf5
27...♗e5 28.♕h5+–

28.♘xf5 ♕xf5 29.♖f1 ♕d7 30.gxh6 ♗xh6 31.♕h5
With unavoidable mate.

5. Ildar Khairullin – Aleksey Goganov

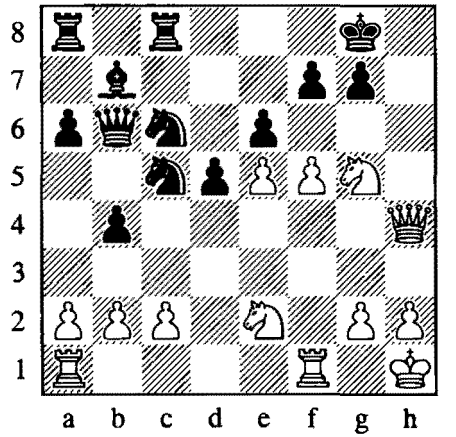
St Petersburg 2012

16.♗xh7†!+–
This sacrifice is a valuable resource in French structures and here it gives White a winning attack. I said I would not cover the Greek Gift in Chapter 21, but I never promised it would not be in the exercise section...

16...♔xh7 17.♕h4† ♔g8
Or: 17...♔g6? 18.f5†! exf5 (18...♔xf5 19.♘g3† ♔g6 20.♕h5#) 19.♘f4#

18.♘g5 ♖fc8 19.f5!
Bringing the rook into the attack.

Or 19.♕h7† ♔f8 20.♕h8† ♔e7 21.♕xg7 ♖f8 22.f5 and White wins.



19...♘xe5 20.f6 gxf6 21.♖xf6 ♔f8 22.♖af1 ♖c7
At this point we shall vary from the game:

23.♖1f5!
Instead, after 23.♘d4 ♔e8 24.♕h7? ♖e7 Black found some defensive resources and eventually won!

The text move wins on the spot, say after:

23...♔e8

No better are 23...exf5? 24.♖xb6 or 23...♘c4 24.♖xf7† ♖xf7 25.♖xf7† ♔e8 26.♕h8#.

24.♖xe5+–

6. Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli – Vasily Papin

Moscow 2010

White converted his superior coordination into a winning attack after:

16.♘xf7! ♔xf7 17.♘e5† ♘xe5
Or 17...♔f8 18.♘xc6 ♗xc6 19.♖xc6 and wins.

18.dxe5 ♘d5 19.♕h5† ♔f8 20.♕xh7 ♗c5 21.♗g6!
Preparing ♕h8xg7.

21...♖ec8 22.♕h8† ♔e7 23.♕xg7† ♔d8
There are many ways to win, and the game finished with:

24.♖xc5
Or 24.h4!? to promote on h8.

24...♖xc5 25.♕f8† ♔c7 26.♕d6† ♔c8 27.♗f7 ♗c6 28.♗xe6† ♔b7 29.♖xd5 ♕b8 30.♖xc5 ♕xd6 31.exd6 bxc5 32.♗f6 ♖e8 33.♗e7
The advance f4-f5-f6-f7 is unstoppable.
1–0

Level 2

7. Daniel Naroditsky – Gata Kamsky

Saint Louis 2011

The position is quite simplified and should be drawn with correct play. Black can gain some practical winning chances if he seizes the initiative with the thematic:

28...b4!
The slow 28...♖c4?! (preparing ...b5-b4) is met by 29.f5 exf5 30.♖xf5 b4 31.axb4 axb4 32.♖gf3 ♖8c7 33.e6! f6 34.♖xd5 bxc3 35.bxc3 ♖xc3† 36.♔e4 with a likely draw.

29.axb4 axb4 30.♔d2
If 30.cxb4 ♖c4∓ and Black is better since 31.f5? no longer works due to 31...♖xb4!∓ threatening ...♖b3 winning the rook on g3.

30...d4!? 31.♖c1?
An understandable mistake.
White could have secured a draw with: 31.cxb4! ♖c2† 32.♔d3 ♖xb2 33.♔e4! (but not 33.♔xd4? ♖xb4† 34.♔e3 ♖c3† 35.♔d2 ♖xg3–+) 33...♖xb4 34.♖d3 ♖cc4 35.♖fd1=

31...♖c4 32.♖f3 dxc3†
Interesting was: 32...♔e7!?∓

33.bxc3 ♖d8†!? 34.♔e2?
Better was 34.♔c2 although it is scary to cut one's own king off from the kingside pawns.

34...♖e4† 35.♔f1
35.♖e3 ♖xf4∓

35...♖c8
And now the c3-pawn is lost.

36.g3 ♖ec4 37.♔e2 bxc3∓
And Black was able to exploit his advantage.
...0–1

8. Rafael Leitao – Manuel Robledo

Mar del Plata 2009

The advantage is based on White's ideal piece placement and the vulnerable d6-pawn. The strongest choice is:

17.e5!
Undermining the knight on c5 and threatening 18.exd6.

White also obtains a big advantage after: 17.♘db5 cxb5 18.♘xb5 ♕e7 19.♘xd6 ♘bd7 20.♘xe8 ♕xe8 21.e5±

Or 17.♘cb5! cxb5 18.♘xb5± transposing to 17.♘db5.

17...dxe5

17...♗f8 is refuted by: 18.♘db5! cxb5 19.exd6 ♗xd6 20.♘xb5+–

18.♘xc6! bxc6 19.♗xc5±

Black's position is destroyed; the c6-pawn is particularly weak.

9. Rafael Leitao – Diego Di Berardino

Manaus 2013

In addition to the plans described in Chapter 3, if White's pieces are active enough, then the following break is possible:

22.d5!+–

This gives White an overwhelming initiative as Black lacks time to organize a defence. The game continued:

22...cxd5 23.♘xf6† ♗xf6 24.♗xf6 gxf6 25.cxd5 ♕e7

25...exd5 doesn't help: 26.♖d4! (threatening ♖g4 and ♕xf6) 26...♕d8 27.♖xd5 ♕b6 28.♖e4 Followed by ♖g4 or ♖h5 with a decisive attack.

26.♕g4† ♔h8 27.dxe6 fxe6 28.♖xe6

And the game soon turned into a won endgame.

10. Bojan Vuckovic – Branko Damljanovic

Valjevo 2000

Black gains a powerful queenside initiative after:

21...a4! 22.b4?

This causes White to lose control of the c-file.

Better was 22.bxa4! ♖xa4 23.♕c1 ♖ca8 24.♖a2 ♗d4 when White must fight for equality.

22...♘b3 23.♕f2 ♖xc2 24.♕xc2 ♖c8 25.♕f2 ♖c3

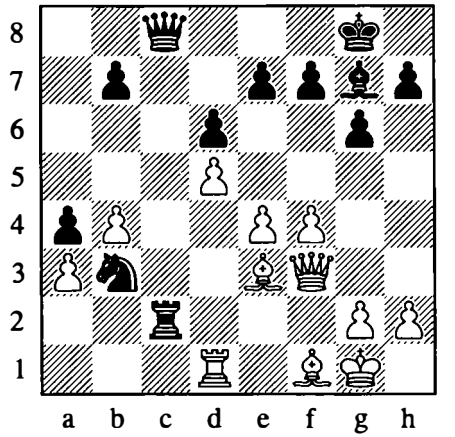
Unlike the game Polugaevsky – Ivkov (page 207), White cannot prevent a c-file invasion, thus he is certainly worse.

26.♖d1 ♕c8 27.f4

Better was 27.♗b5 ♖c2 28.♕f1 ♕a8, though the threat of ...♖a2xa3 is promising for Black.

27...♖c2 28.♕f3 ♗g7

Or 28...♗b2!? is equally strong.



White's position is hopeless, as his pieces are trapped in a cage and the a3-pawn will be lost.

29.♗b5 ♖a2 30.♗xa4 ♖xa3 31.♗b6

31.♗xb3 doesn't help after 31...♖xb3 32.♕e2 ♕c3 33.♗d2 ♕d4† 34.♔f1 ♖b2.

31...♕c2

Even stronger is 31...♕c4! and Black is winning.

32.♕d3 ♕xd3 33.♖xd3 ♖a1† 34.♔f2 ♘c1 35.♖d1 ♖xa4 36.♖xc1 ♖xb4∓

And Black later exploited his advantage.

11. Arik Braun – Rainer Polzin

Germany 2008

One of White's standard plans in this position is the c4-c5 break. This idea is often stronger once Black has played ...b7-b5 because the c6-pawn becomes vulnerable, hence:

12.c5!

This yields a big advantage to White.

12...dxc5

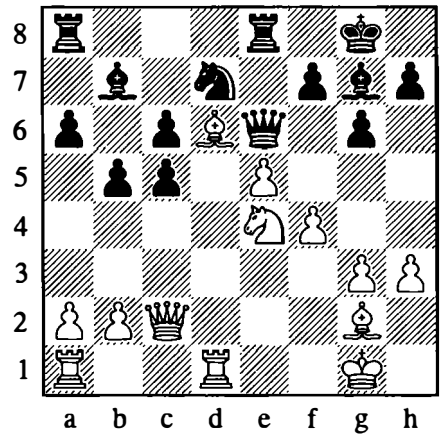
Worse is: 12...exd4 13.cxd6 ♕xd6 14.♘xd4 ♕c7 15.♗f4 ♕b6 16.e5+–

13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♗f4 ♕e6 16.♗d6 ♖e8?

Aggravating the situation.

A better trywas: 16...♖d8 17.♗xc5 (17.e5?! ♘e8) 17...♗b7 18.f4 ♘d7 19.♗d6±

17.e5 ♘d7 18.f4 ♗b7 19.♘e4



White has a decisive advantage, which he exploited as follows:

19...f6 20.♗xc5 ♖ad8 21.♘d6 ♘xc5 22.♘xe8 ♕xe8 23.♕xc5 fxe5 24.fxe5 ♖xd1† 25.♖xd1 ♗xe5 26.♕b6
1–0

12. Alvar Rosell – Predrag Nikolic

Barcelona 2012

Black's biggest problem in the Stonewall is making use of his light-squared bishop. A good solution is:

14...♗a6!

A decent alternative is 14...a5!? 15.a3 ♗a6 16.c5 ♗c4.

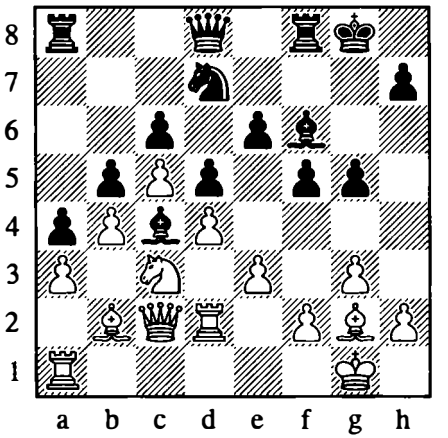
15.c5 ♗c4 16.e3 b5

Now that Black's bad bishop is outside the chain, it makes sense to close the queenside.

17.♘c3 a5! 18.a3 a4

The queenside is completely closed and now ...♗b3 is a threat.

19.♘d2 ♘xd2 20.♖xd2 g5!∓



Black is ready to launch a kingside attack while White cannot execute any of his standard plans.

13. Piotr Dzieczkaniec – Bartlomiej Macieja

Wroclaw 2011

When White has a hanging-pawns structure and his pieces are actively placed, then the d4-d5 break is both natural and strong:

16.d5! exd5 17.♗xd5

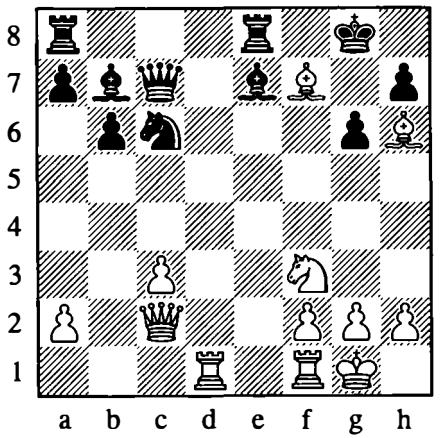
Black's position is very delicate, due to multiple threats, including ♗xf7†.

17...♕c7?

An understandable mistake in a difficult position.

The only defence was 17...♕c8 18.♕d2 ♕f5 19.♖fe1± when White has a pleasant position.

18.♗xf7†!+–



White gains a decisive attack.

18...♔xf7 19.♕b3† ♔f6 20.♘g5
Another winning path was 20.g4.

20...♗f8 21.♗xf8 ♔xg5
21...♖xf8 is also inadequate due to: 22.♕e6†! ♔xg5 (or 22...♔g7 23.♖d7†) 23.f4†! ♔h6 (or 23...♖xf4 24.♖d5† ♔h6 25.♕h3† ♔g7 26.♖d7†) 24.♖d7! ♕xd7 (24...♕c8?? 25.♕h3#) 25.♕xd7 And White wins.

22.f4†
Instead the game continued: 22.♗d6?! ♕c8 23.♕d5†?? (23.♕f7! still wins) 23...♔f6–+ Black's king is completely safe, and White lost.

After the text move, White's attack is easily winning, for example:

22...♔f5
Or 22...♔f6 23.♖d6† ♔f5 24.♕d5† and wins.

23.♗d6 ♕g7 24.♕d5† ♔f6 25.♗e5†! ♘xe5 26.fxe5† ♔g5 27.♕d2† ♔h5 28.g4†!
Forcing mate.

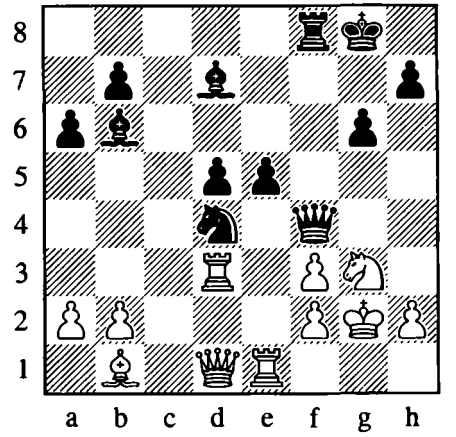
14. Aleksander Mista – David Navara

Czech Republic 2005

18...♖xf3!∓
This sacrifice is a thematic idea in the French Type I structure. Here it works particularly well because White's pieces are poorly placed; it looks as if White was not expecting this blow.

19.gxf3
Or 19.♕xf3 ♘xd4 when Black has an extra pawn after 20...♘xc2. This is why 18.♖c2 was a bad idea.

19...♘xd4 20.♖d2 ♗c5 21.♗g3 ♖f8 22.♖d3 ♕f6 23.♔g2 ♘f4† 24.♗xf4 ♕xf4 25.♘e4 ♗b6 26.♘g3 e5–+



White's position is catastrophic; the pressure against the doubled f-pawns decides the game.

27.♖de3 ♔h8 28.♕d3
28.♖xe5 is of no help: 28...♘xf3 29.♖xd5 ♘xe1† 30.♕xe1 ♕f3† 31.♔g1 ♗xf2†–+

28...e4! 29.♕c3 ♖f6
Preparing ...♘xf3.

30.♘xe4 dxe4 31.♗xe4 ♗c7 32.♖h1 ♗b5 33.h4 ♘e2 34.♕c5 ♘g3 35.♗xb7 ♘xh1 0–1

15. Ralf Akesson – Artur Gabrielian

Pardubice 2010

White's main plan in the asymmetric Benoni is the break e4-e5. In this position Black has failed

to prevent it, so after checking some variations we should be confident to proceed with:

18.e5!+–

Obtaining a crushing central attack. The game continued with:

18...♘d7

18...dxe5 doesn't help after 19.fxe5 ♘d7 20.♗g5.

19.♘e4! b5

Desperation. Instead 19...dxe5 is met by 20.d6! ♖e6 21.♘eg5 ♘f8 22.fxe5 and White will win.

20.axb5 axb5 21.♗xb5 dxe5 22.d6 ♖e6 23.♘fg5

White is winning at least an exchange, and the game finished quickly afterwards.

...1–0

16. Emilio Cordova – Alexis Cabrera

Yucay 2001

Since Black's light-squared bishop is inside the pawn chain, it makes sense to further restrict this bishop with:

13.c5!

Preventing a future ...c6-c5, and now:

13...b6

Hoping to undermine the c5-pawn and opening space for the bishop on c8, but weakening the c6-pawn.

The alternative 13...♘f6 is met by 14.♘d6 ♘e8 15.♘c4 when White has pleasant control of many key squares.

14.b4 a5 15.a3±

This gives White a small but durable advantage, due to the strong d6-square and the weak c6-pawn. White eventually won.

17. Robert Cvek – David Navara

Ledec nad Sazavou 2013

Black is doing very well despite the isolated queen pawn and the simplified position. The reason is that White does not quite have enough time to organize his pieces and fight for the c-file. The right continuation is:

19...♖ac8 20.♔e2

Connecting the rooks.

The try 20.♖c1 is met by 20...♖c6 21.♔e2 ♖dc8 22.♔d2 ♕c7∓ with strong pressure.

20...♕g5

20...♖c6!? is strong too.

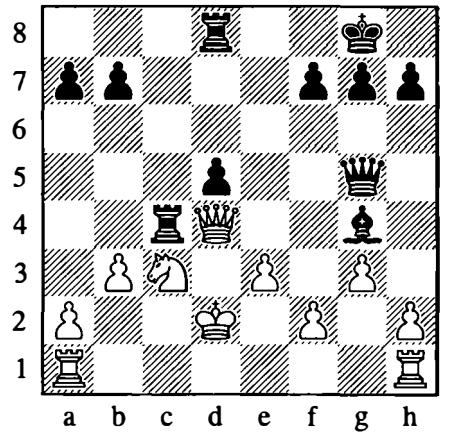
21.g3 ♗g4† 22.♔d2?

This makes things easier for Black.

White was losing a pawn after: 22.f3 ♗xf3† 23.♔xf3 ♕f5† 24.♔e2 ♕c2† 25.♕d2 ♖xc3∓

22...♖c4!

Creating a decisive attack.



23.♕xa7

23.bxc4 dxc4 is also disastrous for White.

23...♕f6 24.bxc4 dxc4† 25.♔c2 ♕xf2† 26.♔c1 ♗f5

0–1

18. Jan Sprenger – David Navara

Sibenik 2012

White is behind in development and Black is ready to win a queenside pawn with:

15...♗c4!

The imprecise 15...0–0 would allow White to stabilize his position after 16.c3 b5 17.♖d1 ♕c6 18.♘d5 ♗d8 19.♗e3 with a balanced game.

16.♘xc4 ♕xc4

Either the c2- or the e4-pawn is lost. This theme is quite common in the Najdorf Type II, and now after:

17.♕f3

Or 17.♕xc4 ♖xc4 18.c3 ♖xe4 and Black is clearly better.

17...♕xc2

White did not have enough compensation for the pawn.

19. Julio Granda Zuniga – Luis Latorre Lopez Moreira

Cochabamba 2013

19.e4!

This break destroys the hanging pawns, yielding White a big advantage.

19...♖e8

Black is losing a pawn after 19...dxe4 20.♘xe4 ♕xd1 21.♖exd1 ♘xe4 22.♗xe4 ♖c7 23.♗xb7 ♖xb7 24.♘xc5.

19...d4 20.♘c4 ♕c7 21.e5 ♘d5 22.♗e4 leaves Black's pieces awkwardly arranged. For example, 22...♘5b6 23.♘axb6 axb6 24.♘d6! ♗a8 25.♘b5 ♕c8 26.f4 and White should win, as he is threatening the strong ♕f3-♘xd4.

20.f4 dxe4

Or 20...♕c7 21.exd5 ♖xe1† 22.♕xe1 ♘xd5 (22...♖d6 23.♗e5! ♘xe5 24.fxe5+–) 23.♕e8† ♘f8 24.♗e5 ♕a5 25.♘c4 winning a piece.

21.♘xe4 ♕c7 22.♗xf6

Black resigned as the material loss is unavoidable.

1–0

20. Krisztian Szabo – Mauricio Flores Rios

Belfort 2005

I spent about thirty minutes calculating the sharp continuations after my ...d5 advance, but it did not occur to me that White had a simple and strong thematic reply:

15.cxd5

My opponent only spent seconds on this move.

Instead 15.exd5? is met by 15...♗c5! 16.♗e3 exd5 when Black is obviously doing fine, for example: 17.cxd5 ♖e8 18.♘c2 b5 19.♕f3 b4 20.♘e4 ♗xd5∓

I carefully analyzed 15.e5? though I concluded that after 15...dxc4 16.♗xc4 (16.exf6?? cxd3–+) 16...♘xe5! 17.♘xe6 ♕xd2!? (or 17...fxe6!∓) 18.♕xd2? ♘xc4∓ Black is doing well.

15...♘c5 16.♗b1

I only calculated 16.e5? ♘xd5 17.♗b1 g6 when Black is doing fine.

16...exd5 17.e5±

This is the point! Instead of wasting time calculating bad ideas, White's thematic reply gives him a better game. Black is left with an isolated queen pawn and a bad bishop on b7.

17...♘fe4 18.♘f5 ♖e8?

Accelerating the loss. Instead correct was: 18...g6 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4 20.♘xe7† ♕xe7 21.♗e3±

19.♕g4!

White has a winning attack.

19...g6

19...♗f8?? loses to 20.♘h6† ♔h8 21.♘xf7†.

More stubborn was 19...♘e6 20.♘xe4 dxe4 21.♗e3 ♔h8 though after 22.♖d1 ♕c7 23.♘xe7 ♕xe7 24.♖d6 White dominates, and should win.

20.♘h6† ♔g7

Or 20...♔f8 21.f5 and White is winning.

21.f5!+–

A nice touch; Black is defenceless and the game finished:

21...♘xd2 22.fxg6 ♔xh6

22...fxg6 23.♖f7† ♔xh6 24.♖xh7†! ♔xh7 25.♕xg6† ♔h8 26.♕h7# and 22...♘xf1 23.♘f5† ♔h8 24.g7† ♔g8 25.♘h6# were not improvements.

23.♖xf7 ♖h8 24.♖e3 ♗h4 25.♖h3 ♘xb1 26.♖xh4†
1–0

21. Penteala Harikrishna – Leinier Dominguez

Melilla 2011

As explained in Chapter 7, the move e4-e5 can be useful to create mating threats. But in an endgame, this move can be more weakening and, as in the game Vovk – Volokitin (page 134), we would expect Black to establish a blockade on d5 and then create a decisive passed pawn on the queenside. This is exactly what happened after:

23...♗e7 24.♘c3 ♘c6 25.♗e4

An option was 25.♗e3 ♘b4 26.♗b1 ♘d5 27.♘xd5 ♗xd5∓ when Black will transfer his king to the queenside and then advance his majority.

25...♗b4!

To gain control of d5.

26.♗xc6 ♗xc6 27.♘d1 ♗e7 28.f3 f5!?

Preventing the manoeuvre ♘f2-e4, as well as a possible kingside expansion.

29.♘f2

White would also be in trouble after: 29.exf6 ♗xf6 30.♗e3 b5 31.a3 a5 32.♔f2 ♔f7∓

29...♗d5∓

Black has blocked the d-pawn and now is ready to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

30.a3 ♗c4

Preventing 31.♘d3.

31.♘h3 b5 32.♔f2 a5 33.♔e1 a4 34.♔d2 b4 35.axb4 ♗xb4† 36.♔c2 a3 37.♘f4 g5 38.♘d3 a2 39.♗b2 ♗f8 40.♘c5 ♗xh6–+

Black has a clear extra pawn and the game concluded with:

41.♔c3 ♗d5 42.♘d7 ♗g7 43.♘b6 h5 44.♘xd5 exd5 45.♔b3 g4 46.♔xa2 ♗h6

To follow up with 47...gxf3 and promoting the h-pawn.
0–1

Level 3

22. Konstantin Landa – Ruslan Ponomariov

Sochi 2012

16.a4?

White should have played something like 16.♖c3, with a tiny advantage. Instead 16.a4 was a big mistake and after:

16...bxa4!

Of course not 16...♖b8? 17.axb5 axb5 18.♖c5± as the b-pawn is more a weakness than a strength.

17.♗xa6 ♖a8

All White accomplished was giving Black a passed pawn on the fifth.

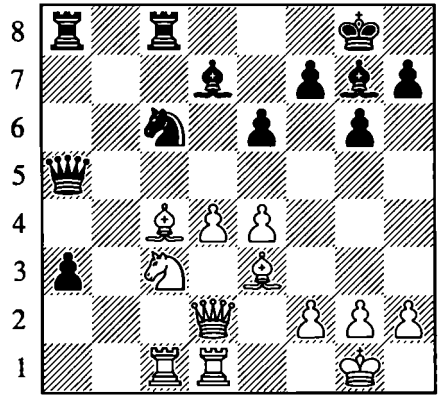
18.♗c4

18.♗b7? is met by 18...♘a5! 19.♗xa8 ♘b3 20.♕d3 ♘xc1 21.♖xc1 ♕xa8∓ when the passed a4-pawn is very strong.

18...♕a5 19.♘c3

If 19.♕xa5 ♘xa5 20.♗d3 ♖fc8 21.♖xc8† ♖xc8 22.♖a1 ♗f8∓ Black is preparing ...a4-a3 with a very good position.

19...♖fc8 20.♖fd1 a3∓



It has only been four moves since White played 16.a4, and it is already evident that the now passed a-pawn will decide the game. The continuation was:

21.h3 ♖ab8 22.♗h6?

Desperation, but after instead 22.♕e1 ♖b2 23.♗f1 ♘b4 Black would win as ...a3-a2 would soon follow.

22...♖b2 23.♕f4 ♗xb6 24.♕xh6 ♘e7!–+

And now Black wins a piece.

25.e5 ♘f5 26.♕f4 ♖xc4

White resigned a few moves later.

...0–1

23. Vladimir Kramnik – Loek van Wely

Wijk aan Zee 2010

White has a slightly superior endgame, but in order to realize the advantage, the best continuation is the thematic piece sacrifice:

40.♗xc5!±

This gives White two passed pawns for the piece.

40...dxc5 41.♘xc5 ♘d6 42.♘xb7 ♘xc8 43.c5 ♘a6! 44.♔e2

As Krasenkow points out, 44.d6? loses the advantage after: 44...♘xc5! 45.♘xc5 ♘xd6=

But a valid alternative was 44.♘b5!?± preparing c5-c6 and d5-d6.

44...♔g6 45.♔d3?

This move allows counterplay.

Correct was: 45.♘b5! ♔f7 46.c6 ♗e7 47.d6 ♘xd6 48.♘7xd6† ♗xd6 49.♘xd6† ♔e6 50.♘c4±

45...♗e7

Black had time for 45...♔f7!? 46.♔c4 ♔e7 followed by ...♔d7, with the point that 47.c6? ♘c7! (preventing 48.♘b5) 48.♔c5 ♘a6† 49.♔c4 ♘c7 seems drawish.

But instead 47.♘b5!?± is still promising.

46.♘a4

But not 46.♔c4? ♗xc5! since 47.♘xc5? loses to 47...♘d6† 48.♔d3 ♘xc5†.

46...♔g5!

A good decision; passive defence was doomed so Black will go for the g2-pawn.

47.♔c4 ♗xc5?

A miscalculation; Black now loses by one move.

As Krasenkow points out, Black could make a draw with 47...♘xc5! 48.♘axc5 ♔g4 and now a sample variation is: 49.♘d3 ♗xa3! 50.♘xe5† ♔g3 51.♘d3 ♔xg2 52.e5 f3 53.d6 f2 54.♘xf2 ♔xf2 55.♔d5 ♗xd6!=

48.♘axc5 ♘xc5 49.♔xc5 ♔g4 50.d6 ♘b6 51.♔c6 ♔g3 52.♘c5 ♔xg2 53.d7 ♘xd7 54.♘xd7 f3 55.♘xe5 f2 56.♘g4

And Black resigned in view of: 56...f1=♕ 57.♘e3†

1–0

24. Sandro Mareco – Ivan Ivanov

Buenos Aires 2009

Moving the rook to b7 was not a good move, as now White can gain control of the b-file after:

22.♗a5! ♕b8 23.♕c2!

Gaining a crucial tempo; White will trade on b7 and bring the other rook to b1, 'winning' the file.

But not 23.♖xb7? ♕xb7 24.♕c2 ♖b8 when Black is still fighting for the open file.

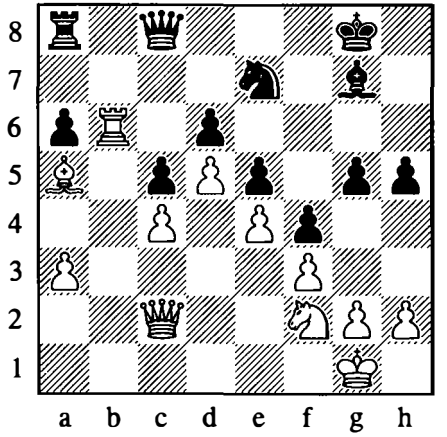
23...♘d7

23...♖aa7? is met by 24.♗b6 ♖a8 25.♗xc5!± and, similarly to a previous exercise, the central passed pawns create a near-winning position.

24.♖xb7 ♕xb7 25.♖b1 ♕c8

More stubborn is 25...♕a7.

26.♘b6! ♘xb6 27.♖xb6±



The d6-pawn is a serious problem. Note how Black is in trouble because he played ...a7-a6; this is similar to Mareco – Cori from Chapter 15 (page 291).

27...♕d7 28.♕b3 ♖a7 29.♖b8† ♘c8 30.♕b6 ♗f8

And now the simple winning move was:

31.♕d8!+–

This would have decided the game quickly:

31...♕xd8 32.♗xd8 ♘e7 33.♘h3 g4 34.♗xe7 ♖xe7 35.♘g5

With 36.♘e6 to follow.

25. Sam Collins – Bartlomiej Macieja

Freemont 2012

White has the bishop pair in a hanging-pawns structure, which is often enough for an advantage. If Black desires to fight back, he must achieve one of the typical breaks against the hanging pawns. The best way to do this is:

13...♕a5

13...e5? is met by: 14.♗a3 ♖e8 15.d5 ♘a5 16.♗b5±

14.♗b2

Instead 14.♗d2 walks into a pin as 14...♘xd4! shows.

14...e5!

Forcing the creation of weaknesses.

15.d5

Worse is 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♕g3 ♘xd3 17.♕xd3 ♖fe8∓ when the c3- and a2-pawns are chronic weaknesses.

15...♘e7 16.d6

Black is also doing well after 16.♗c4 ♘f5 17.♗b3 ♘d6 18.c4 e4 19.♕e2 ♗xb2 20.♕xb2 ♖ac8 when the c4-d5 chain is quite vulnerable.

16...♘c8 17.♕xb7 ♘xd6

Black's ...e7-e5 break has been a success, as White's c3-pawn is weak. The game continued:

18.♕b4?!

Better is 18.♕a6 ♕xa6 19.♗xa6 ♖ab8 20.♗a3 ♖b6 21.♗f1 ♖c8 22.♖ad1 when White manages to maintain equality.

18...♕d5 19.♖ad1 ♖ab8∓

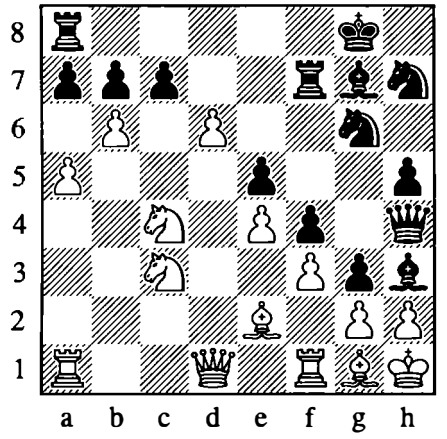
26. Lubomir Ftacnik – Ognjen Cvitan

Germany 1997

White's queenside attack has been a success and Black's best practical chance is:

22...♗h3!

Creating a last-minute tactical threat, and forcing White to make a difficult choice.



23.bxc7??

Blundering away a full point.

Correct was 23.gxh3! ♕xh3 24.♖f2! gxf2 25.♗xf2 when Black has gained an exchange, but is nevertheless close to losing.

23...♗xg2†! 24.♔xg2 ♕h3†!

This is the trick White probably missed.

Instead 24...♘g5? loses after 25.♔h1 ♕h3 26.♖f2 gxf2 27.♗xf2.

25.♔xh3

25.♔h1 g2# was White's fastest route to the exit.

25...♘g5† 26.♔g2 ♘h4†

White resigned in view of 27.♔h1 g2#.

0–1

27. Axel Bachmann – Jorge Britez

Foz do Iguacu 2013

Black's bishop is useless on b7 for the moment, but may become powerful after a potential ...c6-c5. Thus, it makes sense to play:

15.c5!

Turning the c6-pawn into a weakness, and locking Black's light-squared bishop out of the game.

A similar continuation was: 15.♘e5!? ♖ac8 16.c5! ♕c7 17.b4±

15...♕e7

The key to White's previous move is that after 15...bxc5?! 16.dxc5 the c5-pawn is immune: 16...♕e7 (16...♘xc5? fails to 17.♕b4! ♕e7 18.♖dc1 winning a piece; and 16...♕xc5? 17.♖xd7 is obvious) 17.♘e5! ♘f6 (or 17...♘xc5 18.♕b4!±) 18.♕e3± White has a huge advantage.

16.b4

Supporting the c5-pawn.

16...a5 17.a3 ♘f6

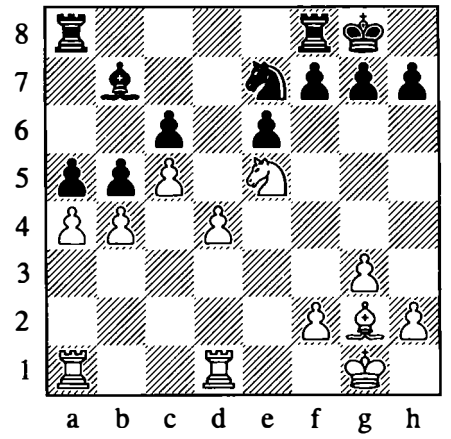
17...axb4 is inadequate after 18.axb4 ♖xa1 19.♖xa1 ♖a8 20.♖xa8† ♗xa8 due to 21.♕f4! threatening ♕c7, and winning because of the weak c6-pawn and d6-square.

18.♕h4 b5 19.♘e5± ♘d5?

Accelerating White's win. A better defence was 19...♕c7.

20.♕xe7 ♘xe7 21.a4!+–

White is winning thanks to the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal, and the weakness of the c6-pawn.



21...axb4 22.axb5 ♖xa1 23.♖xa1 ♖a8 24.♖b1

White won the game a few moves later.

...1–0

28. Jakov Geller – Denis Khismatullin

Taganrog 2013

Black's main plan in the Najdorf Type II is the central break ...d6-d5. White's knight on c3 is currently preventing this objective, therefore it makes sense to play:

18...♗d7!

Threatening ...♘xa3 winning a pawn, and now:

19.♘b1 d5!

Black takes the lead.

20.exd5?!

A better choice was 20.♘d2 dxe4 21.♘xe4 ♗xf5 22.♘xf6† ♗xf6∓ even though White does not have enough compensation.

20...♗xf5 21.b3 e4! 22.bxc4 exf3 23.gxf3 0–0∓

Black has a big advantage due to the bishop pair, his safer king and much superior piece coordination.

29. Rodrigo Vasquez – Adan Rios

Santiago 2010

The Open King's Indian structure offers an advantage to White once he manages to stabilize his position. Here Black is tactically prepared to break in the centre, and he obviously must not miss this chance. The strongest move is:

13...d5!

This break is usually very difficult to carry out, but when it works it has a spectacular effect, destroying White's apparently solid centre.

A move such as 13...♘h5?! 14.♔h2 ♕e7 (but 14...f5!? is a worthy alternative, breaking White's centre) 15.♗e3 would allow White to consolidate his position and slowly improve as in the game Meier – Feller (page 324).

14.b4

If 14.exd5 ♖xe1† 15.♕xe1 ♘xd5! it is Black who ends up with an extra pawn after: 16.cxd5 (even worse is 16.♘de2? ♘d3 17.♕f1 ♘xc3 18.bxc3 ♕d6–+) 16...♗xd4† 17.♔h2 ♗xd5∓

The optimistic 14.e5? loses on the spot due to 14...dxc4! 15.exf6 ♖xe1† 16.♕xe1 ♕xd4† 17.♗e3 ♕xf6.

14...♘fxe4!

This crucial shot turns the balance in Black's favour.

Instead, the game continued with 14...♘cd7? allowing 15.cxd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.f4 when White is back on his feet and fighting for a tiny edge.

15.fxe4 dxc4 16.♗e3

No better was: 16.bxc5 ♗xd4† 17.♖e3 ♗xc5 18.♕e1 ♕f6 19.♔h2 ♗xe3 20.♗xe3 ♖ad8∓

16...♘d3 17.♘de2 ♘xe1 18.♕xe1 ♕e7∓

White has only two knights for a rook and two pawns, in addition to a weak pawn structure and poor coordination.

30. Tigran Gharamian – Nidjat Mamedov

Aix-les-Bains 2011

This version of the Open King's Indian structure is not especially favourable for White, since two pairs of minor pieces are off the board already and the d6-pawn is supported. Hence, it is wise for White to change the structure favourably with:

24.c5!± ♕e6

24...dxc5 is met by 25.♕xc5 with strong pressure, and now a possible continuation is 25...♕e6 26.e5 ♗e7 27.♕d5 ♖bd8 28.♕xe6 fxe6 29.♗e3± with the positional threat of ♗xc6 followed by ♖c1.

25.cxd6 cxd6

Now the d6-pawn is a permanent weakness and White won comfortably.

...1–0

31. Renato Quintiliano – Sandro Mareco

Maringa 2012

Unlike the typical Open King's Indian, Black's dark-squared bishop is on c7, and might eventually attack along the b8-h2 diagonal. In addition, White's kingside is a little vulnerable, and now Black's strongest move is:

20...h5!

This threatens ...h5-h4 to create weaknesses. The game continued:

21.♖d1

Safer was 21.♕d1 ♕e7 22.♗f2 h4 23.g4 though after 23...g5!? 24.fxg5 ♕e5† 25.♔g1 ♕xg5 Black has good counterplay.

21...♕e7 22.♕a3 h4! 23.gxh4?

Correct was 23.g4 g5! 24.♔h1 (but not 24.fxg5? ♕e5† 25.♔g1 ♕xc3 26.gxf6 ♕xc2 and Black wins) 24...gxf4 25.♗xf4 ♘c5 though White must be fighting for equality.

23...♘h5∓

White's kingside is severely weakened, and Black won convincingly after:

24.♘d4 ♘f8 25.♘de2 ♘g6 26.♕c1 ♘xh4 27.♗f2 ♘xg2 28.♔xg2 f5!–+ 29.exf5 ♗xf5 30.♘g3 ♕h4 31.♘xf5 ♘xf4† 32.♔f3 ♕h5† 33.♔g3 d5

0–1

32. Walter Arencibia – Raimundo Vera

Havana 1986

White's bishop is currently useless on f3, but could come into the game after g4-g5 and ♗g4. White needs a central break to gain counterplay, so Black chooses:

23...g5!–+

This is powerful and logical as it undermines White's e4-e5 break. In fact, White cannot execute any of his standard anti-Benoni plans, and Black's undisputed control of the dark squares gives him a decisive advantage already.

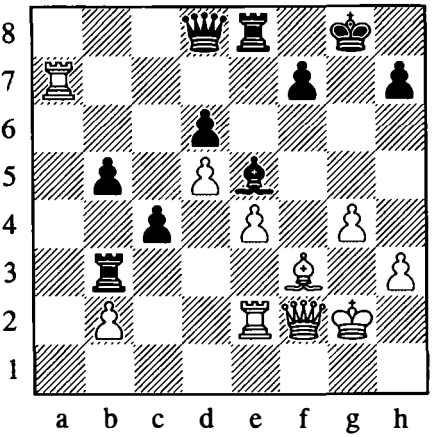
24.♖a7

24.fxg5 is no good after 24...♘e5 25.♖a2 ♘d3 26.♕g1 ♗xb2 when the queenside pawns decide the game.

24...gxf4 25.♗xf4 ♘e5 26.♗xe5

Or 26.♗e3 ♘d3 27.♕f1 ♗xb2 and wins.

26...♗xe5



Now the penetration via the dark squares is unavoidable. The game concluded:

27.h4 ♕f6 28.g5 ♕f4 29.♗h5 ♕h2† 30.♔f1 ♕h1†

White resigned since after 31.♕g1 ♕xg1† 32.♔xg1 ♗d4† the rook on a7 is lost.

0–1

33. Vladimir Kramnik – Judit Polgar

Dortmund 1997

The key is Black's locked-in light-squared bishop. White should transform the structure with:

15.e4! dxe4 16.♘xe4

This position should remind us of White's convincing victory in Ivanisevic – Ascic (page 58).

16...♘xe4

Of course there is no point in 16...♘d5? 17.♘d6± since White's knight has a much better outpost than Black's.

17.♗xe4

White is better due to the difference between the strong bishop on e4, and the restricted bishop on a8. The game continued:

17...♖fd8 18.♖fd1 ♕c7 19.b4 g6 20.♕a3 ♕e7 21.♕f3

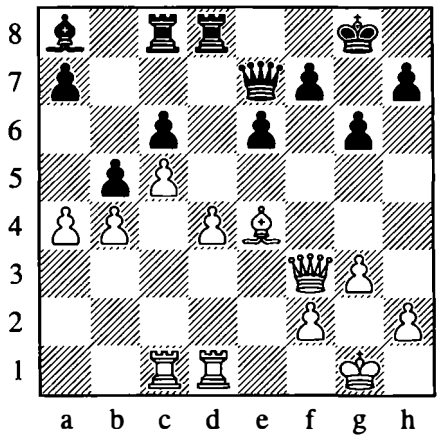
The reader should note how White's d4-pawn is not any weaker than Black's c6-pawn.

21...b5?!

Somewhat better was 21...♔g7 though White's pressure on the queenside is unpleasant after: 22.a4 ♕f6 23.♕e3±

Instead the text move worsens Black's position and after:

22.a4!±



White has a clear advantage which he exploited convincingly.

...1–0

34. Julio Granda Zuniga – Gilberto Milos

Quito 2012

Black gains a decisive attack after:

24...♘xg2!–+

This is the most precise.

The game continued with 24...g4!? which is also strong. For example: 25.fxg4 (a better try is 25.♘xg4 but after 25...♘xg2! 26.♘xh6 ♕h7 Black is winning anyway) 25...hxg4 26.♘xg4 ♘xg4† 27.hxg4 ♘xg2! With a crushing attack.

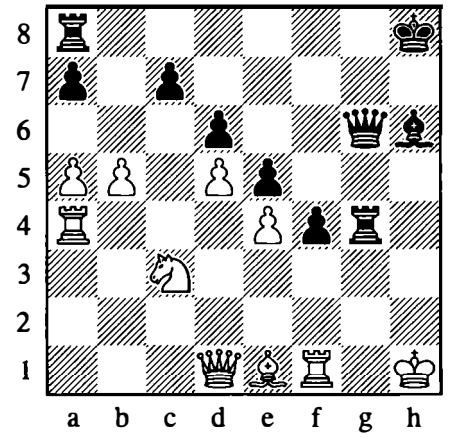
25.♔xg2 g4 26.fxg4 hxg4 27.♘xg4

Or 27.♖h1 f3† 28.♗xf3 gxf3† 29.♔xf3 ♖g3† 30.♔e2 ♖e3† 31.♔f1 ♗d7 followed by ...♕f7 and ...♖f8 with a decisive attack.

27...♘xg4 28.♗xg4 ♗xg4 29.hxg4 ♖xg4† 30.♔h1

30.♔f3? loses on the spot after 30...♖g2! followed by ...♕g4#.

30...♕g6



This type of position is a common result of Black's successful attack. White's king is cut off on the h-file and it is impossible to organize a defence. For example:

31.♕e2 ♖g8 32.♕h2 ♖g2 33.♕h3 ♖g1† 34.♔h2 f3!

Threatening ...♕g2.

35.♖a2 ♖xf1 36.♕xf1 ♗f4† 37.♔h1 ♕h5† 38.♖h2 ♕xh2#

35. Vladimir Epishin – Ognjen Cvitan

Switzerland 1997

We have seen a similar set-up in Ftacnik – Cvitan (pages 430 and 448). Black's threat is ...♗xg2† followed by forced mate, so White should reply:

23.gxh3!

Instead, the game finished: 23.♖e1?? ♗xg2†! 24.♔xg2 ♕h3†! 25.♔xh3 ♘g5† 26.♔g2 ♘h4† 27.♔f1 g2† 28.♔f2 ♘h3#

23.hxg3?? fxg3 is forced mate in two.

23...♕xh3 24.♖f2 gxf2 25.♗xf2±

With a big advantage despite being material down, as Black's attack is over.

36. Jaan Ehlvest – Stefan Kuipers

Gibraltar 2013

The French Type III structure gives White more space and excellent attacking chances. If Black does not challenge White's d4-e5 chain then he will gradually fall into submission. The logical continuation is:

12...f6! 13.exf6?

Correct was 13.h3 ♘xf2 14.♕e2! (but not 14.♔xf2? fxe5∓) 14...fxe5 15.dxe5 and now Black may either keep fighting with 15...♘e4!? or force a draw with: 15...♗xe5 16.♘xe5 (16.♕xf2? ♗d4∓) 16...♘d4 17.♕e3 ♘c2 18.♕e2 ♘d4=

13...♕xf6

Now we have a French Type I structure, but White does not have the time to control the e5-square while Black is threatening the d4-pawn.

14.h3

White could try 14.♘b3 but he is still in some trouble after: 14...a4 15.♘c5 ♘xd4∓

14...♘xf2!–+

This is the key; Black makes use of his knight and now obtains a crushing attack after:

15.♔xf2 ♕xd4† 16.♔e2 ♕b6!

Black only has two pawns for the piece and does not have any next-move threats, but his position is winning as White's king lacks a refuge, and Black has many two-move and three-move threats, such as ...e6-e5-e4. The game concluded:

17.♕b3

Also insufficient is: 17.♘f1 ♗d7 18.♘e3 ♖xf3! 19.♗xf3 ♘d4† 20.♔f2 ♖f8–+

17...♕c7 18.♔f2 a4 19.♕a3 ♘d4 20.♕c3 ♕b6

Preparing 21...♘f3.

21.♕e3 ♗h6! 22.♕xh6 ♘f5† 23.♕e3 ♘xe3 24.♖xe3 e5 25.♔e2 e4 26.♘e1 ♗d7

0–1

37. Qingnan Liu – Bu Xiangzhi

Qinhuangdao 2011

In order to gain counterplay, Black must undermine the knight on d5 with:

19...b5!∓ 20.♘xf6

Black is also better after: 20.♔f2 bxc4 21.♖xc4 ♖xc4 22.♗xc4 ♗xd5 23.exd5 ♖c7∓

20...♔xf6 21.cxb5 ♖xc1† 22.♖xc1 ♖a4!

White probably calculated: 22...♗xa2? 23.b6 ♖b7 24.♖c3 ♖xb6 25.♖xa3 ♗e6 26.b5±

23.♖c3?

Losing a pawn. Instead a stronger defence was 23.♖c2 ♖xb4 24.♗d3∓ holding for now.

23...♗xa2 24.♗d1 ♖xb4 25.♖xa3 ♗c4 26.♖a4 ♖b1!

The crazy 26...♖xa4?? 27.♗xa4 would spoil everything and lose.

27.♖xc4 ♖xd1† 28.♔f2 ♖d2† 29.♔g3 ♖b2 30.♖c7 ♖xb5∓

Black has a healthy extra pawn and won comfortably.

...0–1

38. Rafael Leitao – Andre Diamant

Rio de Janeiro 2009

Black's pressure against the b2-pawn is quite annoying, so it makes sense to continue with:

37.e5!

Other moves would leave White in a somewhat worse position.

37...dxe5 38.f5

This typical pawn sacrifice has blocked Black's dark-squared bishop and opened a diagonal for White's b1-bishop, but now Black can give the pawn back with:

38...e4!

As the e5-pawn only restricted Black's pieces.

Instead the game continued with the tempting 38...♗b7? pressuring the d5-pawn, but 39.f6! decides the game on the spot as 39...♗f8 is met by the strong 40.♗xg6! since 40...fxg6 41.f7† promotes to a queen.

39.f6!? ♗f8 40.♖xe4 ♖exe4 41.♗xe4 ♗d6

This yields a complex position.

39. Vitaly Kunin – Andrei Volokitin

Austria 2012

In the Slav structure, Black must find a way to break in the centre favourably. Here, since White is not yet sufficiently developed, the natural move is:

16...e5!

This forces White to fight for equality.

If Black plays passively with 16...0–0 17.♘f3 ♖fd8 18.♗d2 e6 19.♖fc1± White gradually gains control of the game, in similar style to Morozevich – Mamedyarov (page 73).

17.♘b3

Black is also more comfortable after: 17.dxe5 ♗xe5 18.♖b1 0–0–0∓

17...exd4 18.exd4 0–0

White has obtained an unfavourable isolani, since the queens are off the board and the d4-pawn is easily attacked. Black eventually won.

...0–1

40. Evgenij Agrest – Fabiano Caruana

Arvier 2007

White's pieces are ideally arranged for:

25.b4!

Preventing Black's queenside expansion, and threatening b4xc5.

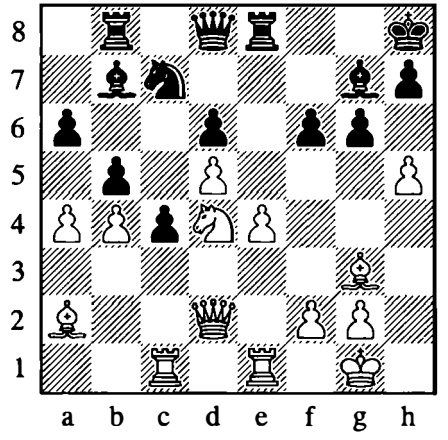
25...c4

If 25...cxb4 26.♕xb4 ♗f8 27.♘d4 ♗b7 28.♘c6 ♗xc6 and White is dominating and winning after either 29.♖xc6 or 29.dxc6.

26.♘d4

Instead of this strong move, the game continued 26.a5!? ♕e7 27.♘d4± with a big advantage as well.

26...♗b7 27.h5!±



White has good chances all over the board. It is clear that Black will not gain anything from queenside play, so it is best for White to keep the tension on b5 in case he ever wants to take with a4xb5 and play down the a-file.

41. Mauricio Flores Rios – Salvador Alonso

Magistral Endesa 2007

18.a3 was a mistake, as White should first have played 19.♗d1 to cover b3, and only then 19.a3. Black refutes White's play with:

18...a4!

Forcing the destruction of White's queenside structure.

19.bxa4

The point is that 19.b4? is met by: 19...♘b3∓

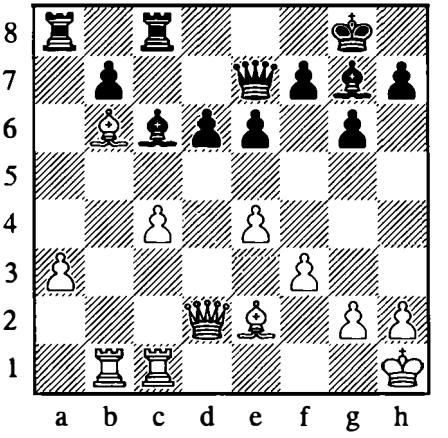
19...♘xa4 20.♘d5

And now Black should have chosen:

20...e6

Instead Black played 20...♗xd5?! 21.cxd5 ♘c3 22.♖xb7 ♖xa3 23.♗f1 after which the position was roughly balanced.

21.♘b6 ♘xb6 22.♗xb6 ♕e7∓



Black is a little better, since White no longer has any promising queenside plans and the pawns on a3 and c4 could be vulnerable.

42. Zoltan Almasi – Bartlomiej Macieja

Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

Black's a4-pawn prevents White from protecting his c4-pawn. On the other hand, this a4-pawn could be vulnerable if the position became more open. Therefore, the strongest continuation is:

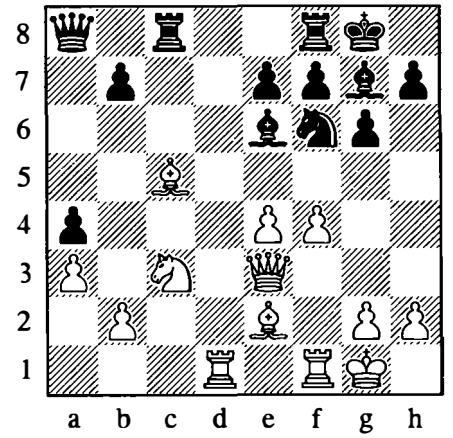
17.♗b6

Instead 17.♘d5?! ♘xd5 18.cxd5 ♗xd4 19.♖xd4 ♗d7 20.♖b4 b5± only gives a small edge.

17...♕a8 18.c5!

Opening lines, and making the a4-pawn vulnerable.

18...dxc5 19.♗xc5±



Black is unable to manoeuvre freely as he has less space and must worry about the weak a4-pawn. White was able to impose his advantage after:

19...♖fe8 20.♖d2 ♘d7 21.♗b4 ♘b8 22.f5!
Initiating a kingside attack.

22...♗b3 23.♘d5 ♘c6 24.♘b6 ♕a7 25.♗c5 ♖cd8 26.♘d7 ♕a8 27.♗b6 ♖c8 28.e5 ♘a5 29.e6!+–
Black is defenceless; note how his queen is completely locked out of the game.

29...gxf5 30.♖xf5 ♖c1† 31.♔f2 ♘c6 32.♖xf7 ♔h8 33.♕e4 ♖h1 34.h3
1–0

43. Romain Edouard – Miso Cebalo

Biel 2012

A typical resource in the Maroczy or the Dragon structures is the sequence:

18.♗xf6! ♗xf6 19.♘d5 ♕xd2 20.♘xf6†!
This intermediate move is the key, forcing Black to double his pawns.

20...exf6
A common reply is 20...♔g7 21.♖xd2 ♔xf6 avoiding the doubling of pawns, but in this particular position White has 22.fxg6† ♔xg6 23.e5!± winning the d6-pawn since 23...♖a6?! is met by 24.♖d3! with a winning attack against Black's king. For example: 24...♔g7 25.♖g3† ♔f8 26.♗h5 ♗e6 27.♗xf7! ♗xf7 28.e6 and the position is bad enough to resign.

21.♖xd2±
And White eventually won this superior endgame.
...1–0

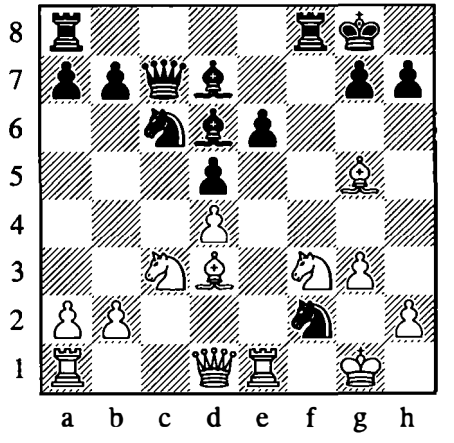
44. Tamaz Gelashvili – Jan Timman

Saint Vincent 2000

14...♘g4!
Attacking h2 and opening the f-file for an attack.

15.g3
Or 15.h3? ♗h2† 16.♔f1 ♘xf2! 17.♔xf2 ♕g3† 18.♔f1 ♕xg5 when Black is a pawn up *and* the attack is not over. Black will win after, for example, 19.♗c2 ♖xf3†! 20.♕xf3 ♘xd4 21.♕f2 ♘xc2 22.♕xc2 ♖f8†.

15...♘xf2!
The decisive blow.



16.♔xf2 ♘xd4 17.♗e2 ♘xf3 18.♗xf3 ♖f5!
Black's threats along the f-file are decisive.

19.♗f4

Or 19.♗c1 ♖af8 20.♖e3 ♗c5 and wins.

19...♗xf4 20.gxf4 ♕xf4 21.♔g2 ♖af8 22.♖f1 d4!–+

Now the 'bad' bishop comes into the game decisively.

23.♘e4 ♗c6 24.♕xd4 ♕h4 25.♕d6 ♖xf3! 26.♖xf3 ♕g4† 27.♖g3 ♕xe4† 28.♔h3 ♕f5† 29.♔h4 ♕f6†

White resigned since his position is desperate after 30.♔h3 ♕h6† 31.♔g4 ♗f3† 32.♖xf3 ♕g6† 33.♔h4 ♕e4†.

0–1

45. Damian Lemos – Manuel Larrea

Asuncion 2011

White can proceed with:

11.♕b3!

A tricky move, attacking the b7-pawn to disrupt Black's play.

11...b6?

11...♗c8 was necessary, but White is a little better after: 12.cxd5 cxd5 (or 12...exd5 13.e4! fxe4 14.♘xe4 ♕e6 15.♘xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖ae1±) 13.♘b5 ♕e7 14.♘xd6 ♕xd6 15.e3 ♘c6 16.♖fc1 ♗d7 17.♗f1± Followed by ♗b5xc6 and ♘e5.

12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘xd5!+–

This is the tactical point of 11.♕b3.

13...exd5 14.♕xd5† ♕e6 15.♕xa8 ♘c6 16.♕b7

White won easily.

...1–0

Level 4

46. Teimour Radjabov – Gadir Guseinov

Baku 2010

16.exd5!±

A good decision; White has a small but steady advantage since Black is unable to carry out the ...b7-b5 break, nor is he ready to fight for the e4-square.

If 16.cxd5 then we reach an asymmetric Benoni where Black's pieces are ideally placed and his light-squared bishop has already been traded. It is not surprising that after 16...♖b8 17.a5 (or 17.f3 b5 18.axb5 axb5 19.♖a1 c4) 17...b5 18.axb6 ♖xb6 Black has good counterplay.

16.♘xd5 is answered by 16...♘xd5!? and now White must make the same decision as before, but with fewer pieces on the board, hence a less significant spatial advantage, while 17.♕xd5 ♘f6 18.♕xb7 ♕b8 19.♕xb8 ♖axb8 is about equal.

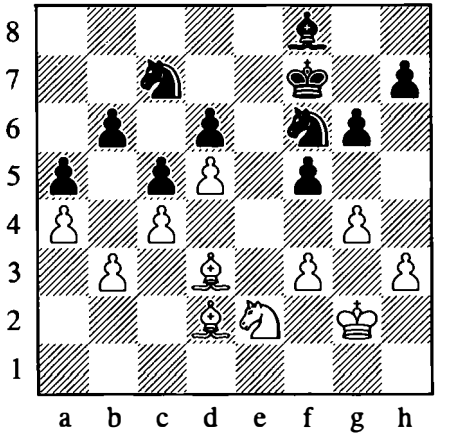
16...a5

If 16...♖b8 17.a5 b6 18.axb6 ♖xb6 19.♗d1 ♖b4 20.b3± and White's queenside is rock solid.

17.g3 f5 18.♔g2 ♘f6 19.♗d3 ♕d7 20.♗g5!?

Heading for a slightly superior endgame where White is the only one with winning chances.

20...♖xe1 21.♖xe1 ♖e8 22.b3 ♖xe1 23.♕xe1 ♕e8 24.♕xe8† ♘fxe8 25.♘e2 ♘f6 26.♗f4 ♗f8 27.f3 ♔f7 28.♗d2 b6 29.g4!±



Black is already in a delicate position; White eventually won the game.

...1–0

47. Rafael Leitao – Carlos Barreto

Campinas 2009

We have a symmetric structure. Since White's bad bishop is inside the chain, on d2, White has little chance to gain an advantage in this structure. However, he has a lead in development, and can transform the structure favourably with:

14.e4!± ♗b7?!

Stronger was 14...dxe4 15.♗xe4 ♖a7 16.♗g5 ♗f6 17.h4!?± though this isolani position is better for White, due to his superior coordination.

15.e5

Now White enjoys a pleasant version of a French Type III structure. The c-file is open, but there is little Blackcan do with it, which is similar to the game Granda – Narciso (page 384).

15...♖c8?!

Playing routinely, but occupying the open file will not help Black.

Black could transfer to a French Type I structure with:

15...f6!?

This is weakening but probably necessary, and after:

16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♖fe1

17.♖ac1!? is probably more precise, preventing ...e6-e5 for now, since 17...e5? is refuted by: 18.♗e4! exd4 19.♗xd5† ♗xd5 20.♕xd5† ♔h8 21.♖c6±

After the text move White is threatening ♗f4 to obtain a big advantage, as in the game Areshchenko – Vovk (page 354) but now Black replies:

17...e5!

This break has to be made now or never, and after:

18.dxe5 ♘xe5 19.♘xe5 ♗xe5 20.♗c3±

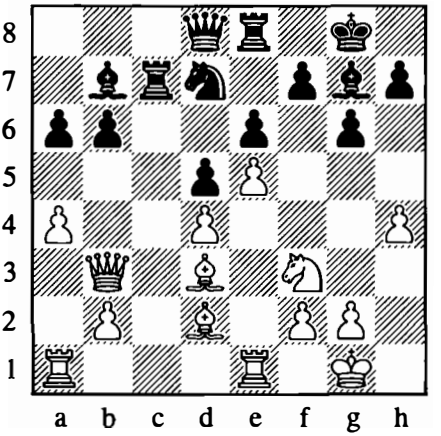
Black is worse but has some chances to hold an endgame.

16.♖fe1 ♖c7

Now it is too late for 16...f6 due to 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♗f4 with good control of the e5-square. A possible continuation is 18...♘b8 19.♗e5 ♗xe5 20.♘xe5 ♘c6 21.♘xc6 ♖xc6 22.♖e5 ♕f6 23.g3 ♖ec8 24.♔g2± and the game will proceed just like Areshchenko – Vovk did, implementing the plan h2-h4-h5.

17.h4!±

Once again, the standard h4-h5 is strong in this position and will create a decisive attack.



17...♕a8 18.♗b4!

Taking an important diagonal.

18...♗f8 19.♗xf8 ♖xf8

Trading dark-squared bishops favours White as the black king's defences are now even weaker.

20.h5 ♖fc8

Where are the rooks going now? White has a decisive attack and decided the game easily after:

21.♘g5 ♕a7 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.♕d1 ♘f8 24.♕g4

Black resigned due to the unavoidable threat: ♕h4-♖e3-♖h3-♕h8#

1–0

48. Jorge Cori Tello – Hrant Melkumyan

Moscow 2012

We have a Carlsbad structure where White has played b2-b3 instead of the more usual c2-c3. In Chapter 5 we studied an identical structure in the game Wojtaszek – Khairullin (page 94), but with reversed colours. According to that game, Black's plans should be based on playing ...a7-a5, ...b6-b5-b4 and then either ...♗a6 to trade bishops and pressure c2, or break in the centre with ...e6-e5.

As the reader may notice, neither plan works here. Despite the level appearance of the position, Black experiences some difficulties already because he lacks a plan. The game continued:

12.♕e2 ♖c8 13.f4 ♕c7 14.♖f2 ♘g6 15.g3 ♕e7 16.h4!

Beginning a kingside attack; note how Black simply marks time.

16...♖fe8

Or 16...♕d8 17.h5 ♘e7 18.g4! preventing ...♘f5; there is no counterplay and White may prepare a kingside assault for as long as he needs to.

17.h5 ♘f8 18.g4 ♘6d7 19.g5!

An excellent decision that entails a strong pawn sacrifice; Black's forces are paralyzed.

19...♗xe5?!

This accelerates defeat.

Sturdier was waiting with 19...♖c7 though after 20.♕e3 ♖ec8 21.♘df3 ♕e8 22.♖g2± the eventual g5-g6 break will be strong.

20.fxe5

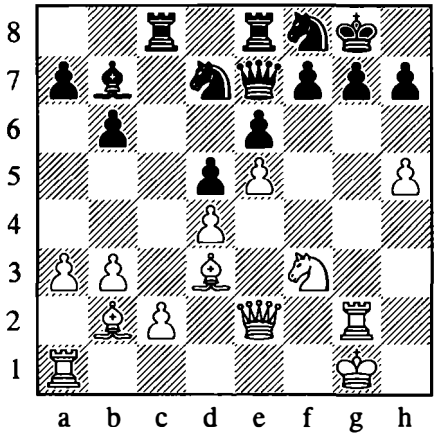
This is the point – the g5-pawn can be sacrificed.

But not 20.dxe5? ♘c5 when Black gains counterplay.

20...♕xg5† 21.♖g2 ♕e7

Or 21...♕h4 22.♘f3 ♕xh5 23.♖h2 ♕g4† 24.♔f2 followed by 25.♖g1 ♕f4 26.♗c1 trapping the queen.

22.♘f3+–



White has a crushing attack, and the game finished convincingly:

22...f6 23.♗c1 fxe5 24.♗g5 ♕d6 25.♘xe5 ♘xe5 26.dxe5 ♕c5† 27.♔h2 d4 28.♖g3 ♖c7 29.♖ag1 ♖f7 30.♗f6 ♖ee7 31.♕g4 ♕c7 32.♗xe7 ♕xe7 33.♕xd4 ♘d7 34.h6 ♘xe5 35.♔h3 ♘g6 36.♗xg6 hxg6 37.♖xg6 ♖f3† 38.♖1g3 ♖xg3† 39.♖xg3 g5 40.♕e5 ♔h7 41.♖xg5 ♔xh6 42.♕h8†!

Black resigned as the queen is lost after 42...♔xg5 43.♕h4† ♔f5 44.♕xe7.

1–0

49. Cardenas Garcia – Villagra Henriquez

Punta Arenas 2014

14...♘xd5

This capture is a good decision because White does not have an ideal recapture.

Best now is 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♕xd5 but since the pawn on c2 is falling, the position is only equal after 16...♖xc2 and 17.♕xb7. Instead, White made a poor decision by playing:

15.exd5?!

Obtaining a Najdorf Type I structure where Black has every reason to be optimistic. The position is simplified, there are chances for kingside play and White is unlikely to achieve a queenside expansion. The game continued:

15...♗d7 16.c4?

This pawn will only become a target.

Better was 16.♘f5 ♗xf5 17.♕xf5 g6 18.♕d3 ♔g7 19.♗e3 f5 though Black's position is somewhat more comfortable.

16...f5

A natural move, taking some important central squares.

17.♗d2 b5! 18.b3 f4!∓

Initiating a kingside attack. Black dominates on both flanks, and the game continued:

19.♘f1 ♕b6 20.♖ac1 ♗h4 21.♕e2 h5 22.h3 e4!

Threatening ...f4-f3.

23.♗xf4?

A poor defence.

More stubborn was 23.g3 fxg3 24.♘xg3 ♖f3 25.♘xe4 ♖cf8∓ though Black's attack is close to winning.

23...♖xf4 24.g3 ♖f3 25.gxh4 ♖cf8 26.♖c2 ♖8f4 27.♘e3 ♖xh3 28.♘g2 ♖g4
0–1

50. Peter Heine Nielsen – Roland Berzinsh

Eretria 2011

White's advantage is obvious, but for the moment it is not clear how to make progress. The c7-pawn is a weak backward pawn, but cannot be attacked. Instead, White transformed the position favourably with:

20.♗xd6! cxd6 21.♘c4

Now White has a big advantage in a King's Indian Type I position. He controls the c-file while Black's standard counterplay with ...f7-f5 is unlikely to be achieved. The game continued:

21...♖b7 22.♘fd2 ♗e8 23.♘b6 ♖ab8 24.♘c8!

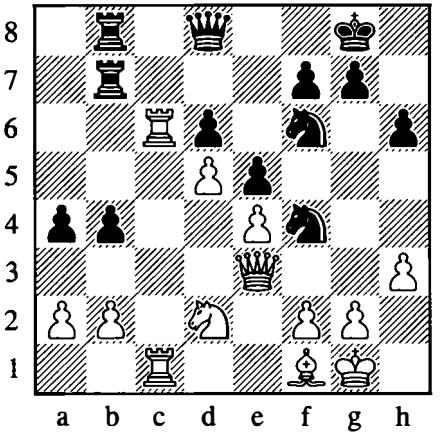
A nice manoeuvre, heading toward c6 via a7.

24...♕d8

Preventing 25.♘a7 with 24...♕d7? loses to 25.♖c6.

25.♘a7 a4 26.♘c6 ♗xc6 27.♖xc6

Now the d6-pawn is a serious target.



27...♘e8

Or 27...♖b6 28.♕xb6! ♖xb6 29.♖c8 ♖b8 30.♖xd8† ♖xd8 31.♖c6 and White is winning at least one pawn.

28.♘c4 ♖a8

Waiting with 28...♘g6 is met by 29.♖a6 and now the a4-pawn is lost since 29...♖a8 loses to 30.♘a5!.

29.♘b6 ♖a5

Or 29...♖ab8 30.♘xa4 and White wins.

30.g3 ♘g6 31.♖c8 ♕e7

Black resigned due to 32.♖xe8†! ♕xe8 33.♖c8.
1–0

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